NANCY'S COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

ELEANOR HOYT

76

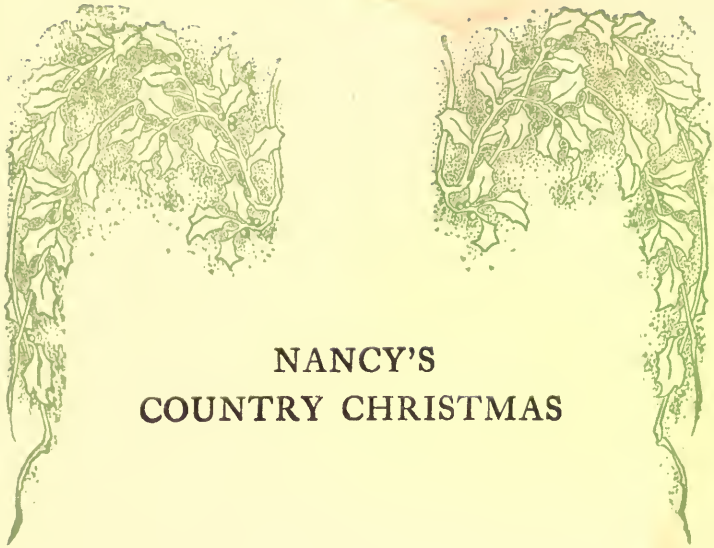
To O. E. R.

from

N.

Dec 4, 1904

"Read about "Nancy" as much as you please, but have more pity for "some of us" than she had for "the man who came after".



NANCY'S COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

Nancy's Country Christmas

AND OTHER STORIES

By

ELEANOR HOYT

Author of "The Misdemeanors of Nancy"

Frontispiece by Anna Whelan Betts

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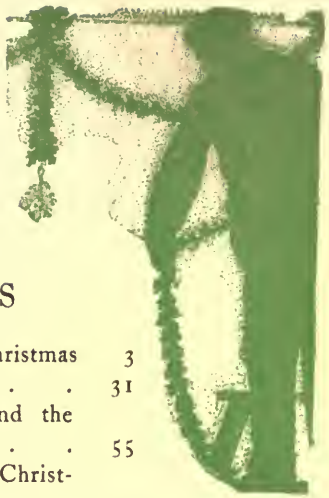

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NANCY'S COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

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MOLLY BLESSINGTON was reponsible for the whole affair. At least, that is Nancy's theory.

It was in the summer of '98 that the Blessingtons bought their country place at Hilldale, New Hampshire. When November came Molly's enthusiasm was still intact, and she flatly refused to go back to city duresse and open the big town house.

"We'll stay here and entertain a Christmas house-party," she said cheerfully. Dick Blessington did not yearn for a merry Yule-tide in the wilds of New England; but, being wise in his generation, he did not mention that fact.

"Nobody will come," he asserted hopefully. "You couldn't get any of the fellows up here if you'd promise all of them ten-thousand-dollar cheques in their Christmas stockings."

"They'll all come."

"But why?"

"I'll have Nancy. So I'll have the men, and, having eligible men, girls will be a drug in the market. It's quite simple."

Mr. Blessington recognised the force of the logic, but fired a final gun.

"She won't come."

"She has promised."

Molly's impromptus are usually the result of careful planning. Her husband lighted a cigar and resigned himself to the inevitable.

"I suppose you've invited the gang already?"

"Yes, dear."

She looked at him and he struggled for stern disapproval. Then they both laughed. The Blessingtons are very young and exceeding foolish.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of December 24th an express train thundered into a little New England station, spilled Nancy and a few other passengers on a snow-drifted platform, and whizzed away into the driving storm. On the other side of the station a stunted engine was fidgeting and hurling ill-natured remarks at three ramshackle, comfortless cars. The exiles from the through line boarded the stuffy, stove-heated train. The engine went through a final paroxysm of rage and pulled sulkily out into a whirling white world.

Nancy tucked herself into a grimy red plush

seat and gave herself up to thinking unutterable things about her dressmaker. If that obnoxious person had sent the promised gowns home on time, the young woman for whose use the gowns were intended would now have been wearing the delectable new tea-gown in front of a blazing log-fire at The Oaks, instead of rattling along in an air-tight oven over a fluted road-bed. The past thought that some six or seven young men were missing that tea-gown afforded a certain solace. Nancy wondered, with something approaching cheerfulness, whether they had *all* taken her train the day before. On the whole, perhaps, it was amusing to be a day behind schedule time.

The conductor called out the stations in a fretful bawl. They all sounded more or less alike in his translation. Nancy dozed, and dreamed, and awoke, and dozed again. Finally she slept soundly, huddled in a corner.

She awoke with a start. The window was black. Ill-smelling lamps had been lighted. Only three other passengers were left in the car. An awful misgiving smote her. She had a vision of a Christmas pudding vanishing in a storm-swept distance. The train was due in Hilldale at seven-thirty. Had she been carried past? She felt for her watch, then

remembered it had not been wound in days. She looked for the conductor. He had fled to other haunts. She opened her lips to ask a nodding old man for information, but it wasn't necessary. The train stopped with a lurch. A youthful brakeman opened the front door and yelled "Hilldale!" Nancy blessed her guardian angel, gathered up her bag and umbrella, and hurried out through the rear door. A moment later she was standing on a tiny platform, beside a bandbox station.

No one of the six to give her effusive welcome? She looked about her incredulously.

Then she registered a mental vow that the storm-bound laggards should pay heavily for their defection before the season of good-will to men had passed.

At least, Molly had sent the carriage. It was waiting farther down the platform—a snug brougham, looking out of place in the vast solitude.

Nancy struggled toward it, against the howling wind.

There was a snow-man on the box.

"You came for me?" asked Nancy.

The snow-man touched his huge white hat.

"Yes, miss," he said, with muffled respect. "Atkins will get your boxes."

He leaned over and opened the door.

Nancy climbed in and sank back upon the cushion. This was more like it.

The carriage rolled away, but not swiftly, for the horses were floundering breast-high in drifts.

The drive was a long one, but at last the carriage stopped before a rambling old stone house. The door flew open, letting a great wave of light and colour surge out into the night. A man ran down the steps. In the darkness Nancy could not recognise him. She looked past him, expecting to see Molly's face in the doorway, but it wasn't there.

The man opened the carriage door. Nancy stepped out. A jest was on her lips, but it was never launched; the lips were otherwise engaged. The man had gathered the young woman into a vigorous embrace, and was kissing her with an enthusiasm that left her no breath for protest. Then he lifted her in his arms, carried her lightly up the steps, and set her down on the broad veranda.

"Merry Christmas!" he said jovially.

For once in her career Nancy Reynolds was speechless. Words seemed so hopelessly in-

adequate. The light streaming out from the hall fell upon her bewildered and angry face.

The Man looked down at her, started, stared and backed violently away from her.

"Good Lord!" he stammered, in awestruck tones. "G—good Lord!" Then he added, in a small, hushed voice that quavered: "I thought you were Nell."

The scathing remarks for which Nancy racked her brain refused to be dragged into the open. She felt a horrible conviction that inside of thirty seconds she would inevitably cry.

"Where's Molly?" she asked weakly.

"Molly?" The man's face was a blank.

"Isn't this Mr. Blessington's place?"

"Blessington's?" He was a mere helpless echo. Nancy's wrath surged higher. Her expression spurred the echo into original utterance.

"Why, no. My name is Monroe. I was expecting my sister. But won't you come in? You mustn't stand out here. I'm very sorry. I don't see—I don't know—I—I——" He trailed off into utter rout and confusion, and his unexpected guest stepped into the big hall.

It was a cheerful place. Huge logs blazed gaily on the hearth and sent flickering shadows

over the panelled wainscoting, the rugs, the tall book-cases, the curving stairway. The red shades of the lamps seemed as warm as the dancing flames. Easy chairs were drawn invitingly near the fire. The odor of cigar smoke clung to the air. The big table was littered with books and magazines. Through a half-open door to the left there was a glimpse of another table, where shaded candle-light fell softly upon white napery and china and glass.

Nancy was cold, despite her burning wrath. Incidentally, she was very hungry. She looked appreciatively toward the fire. She shot a glance toward the festive promise behind the half-open door. Then she lifted her eyes and looked, fairly and squarely, at six-feet-two of mute masculine misery.

The anger in her eyes was diluted with curiosity. Nell's brother was good to look at, even when hopelessly embarrassed and distinctly afraid of a small, insulted young woman. His blue eyes held a desperate appeal for mercy. Alarm and amusement were struggling with his clean-cut lips.

He was a gentleman. The most casual glance would have decided that. Nancy turned to the fire. After all, if one must be kissed and carried up front steps by a

stranger, things might have been worse; but she held fast to her injured dignity.

"Could you direct me to Mrs. Blessington's?" she asked, icily.

The man looked unhappy.

"I wish I could help you, but I don't know of any such place. It can't be near here."

"But this is Hilldale."

"Oh, no! This is Hinsdale. Hilldale is about fifty miles farther west."

Nancy dropped limply into a chair.

"I thought the brakeman called Hilldale. I was half asleep. Could you let your coachman take me back to the station?"

The man looked more embarrassed than ever.

"But there's no train to-night."

Nancy gasped.

"Then if you would please tell me where to find a hotel or a boarding-place."

"I'm afraid there's nothing of the kind within miles. You see, there's no village here—nothing but the station."

The haughty guest was rapidly reaching a state of confusion equal to that of her host.

"The station——" she began; but he interrupted her.

"Miserable little hole. The agent lives there alone."

"If I could drive to a village," Nancy faltered.

"There isn't one within eighteen miles, and you couldn't get there to-night over these roads."

Nancy longed for her wrath of an earlier moment. Anything would be better than crying, and she felt that tears were due. One actually broke loose and rolled dismally down her cheek.

The man stepped forward impulsively.

"Don't," he said entreatingly. "You will be quite all right here. I'm delighted to be of service. Of course, it is annoying for you, and you are disappointed and miserable, but Mrs. Wilson will make you comfortable to-night, and to-morrow I'll do anything I can. Just consider the house yours. Now, if Nell were only here. I'm such a duffer. I—— Oh, don't, please don't."

The tears were trickling fast now. Nancy dabbed hastily at her eyes with a limp wad of kerchief.

"I'm j—j—ust t—t—ired and c—cold," she said, miserably.

Mine host disappeared. In a moment he

came back with a decanter, a glass, and a fat, elderly woman to whom he was offering voluble, if confusing, explanation.

When she saw Nancy, she brushed the Man-Body away unceremoniously.

"Why, you poor lamb," she clucked, like a comfortable mother-hen, and in a jiffy she had whisked off the damp coat and hat, tucked two cushions behind the limp little figure, put a footstool under two diminutive feet, and administered a heroic dose of whisky. The ineffectual masculine stood by, awkwardly holding the decanter and looking relieved.

"You'll stay right here the night," clucked the housekeeper. "Miss Nell's room's all ready. You just rest there a minute and then I'll take you up-stairs. You'll be needing your dinner, poor child."

Fifteen minutes later Nancy came slowly down the curving stairway. She was dry and warm, and her spirits had soared.

Her host stood waiting on the hearth-rug, and came forward with ill-concealed trepidation to meet her.

They looked at each other politely. Then, suddenly, Nancy laughed. When Nancy laughs her dimples have their way.

Colin Monroe went down before the dimples.

"And I didn't know what I was kissing," he reflected, ruefully.

It was a pleasant little dinner. Visions of Molly and the six rose occasionally before Nancy's eyes. The thought of her mother's sentiments, could she but behold her wandering child, deepened the pink in her cheeks; but her conscience was clear.

As for Colin Monroe, he vowed a royal offering to the god of chance. To expect a sister—even the dearest of sisters—and to get this! He sighed for satisfaction, and beamed across the holly at the young woman in the blue travelling frock.

"I'm so sorry you should be disappointed about your sister's coming," murmured Nancy, sympathetically.

"Oh, I'm glad it—that is, I'm sure nothing's wrong. She probably telegraphed, but telegrams usually reach this out-of-the-way place a week after they are sent."

"Has she been gone long?" Nancy asked.

"Years. You see, it's like this. We all lived here when Nell and I were youngsters. Then we lost our father and mother, and this old home was sold. I went to school, and spent my holidays in the office of a bachelor uncle. Nell went abroad with an aunt and

has been there ever since. I finished college, settled down to work, and had no chance to go to Europe. This fall my uncle dropped off suddenly, poor old chap. He left me his money. There's a lot of it. Then Nell wrote that they were coming back to America to stay, and would be in New York December 23d. It struck me it would be a lark to buy the old home, get it as nearly into the old shape as possible, and have the little sister come here for Christmas. She liked the idea, and it all went smoothly until——"

"I came," finished Nancy, apologetically. "I'm *so* sorry."

"Don't be sorry," urged the devoted brother. "I'm not—at least (with a pang of contrition for his own disloyalty), I'd like to see Nell, but —oh, hang it! A fellow *couldn't* be sorry, you know."

Nancy smiled.

After dinner they put up holly. There was a load of it, and acquaintance ripens astonishingly under the influence of Christmas holly. There's some insidious spirit of festivity and good-will lurking in the Yule-tide green-and-red; and when step-ladders wobble, and hands touch, and holly-berry crimson is reflected in dimpled cheeks, and a maid looks up and a

man looks down—well, acquaintance makes progress. Nancy has helped many a man put up holly. In fact, she's by way of being a connoisseur on Christmas decoration.

When, at a discreetly early hour, she said good-night, she left behind her six-feet-two of shining radiance.

Christmas morning dawned clear and cold. It was nine o'clock before Nancy strolled down into the holly-decked hall. Since there would be no train until noon, why hurry?

Her host had already breakfasted when she put in an appearance; but, while she lingered over her coffee, he came in, clad in riding clothes and glowing from the tingling cold.

"I've been down to the station," he announced, after Christmas greetings, "and I have bad news for you."

His air of joyous elation was a misfit upon a bearer of sad tidings, and he realised it; but his effort to look politely sympathetic was a dismal failure.

"Everything is tied up along the line. There will be no train through from either direction before evening, if then."

His smile was openly radiant.

Nancy has better control over her facial muscles. She looked pathetically distressed.

"And it isn't possible to drive to Hilldale?"

"Out of the question."

"Then I must impose upon you a few hours longer." She left the table, walked to the window, and stood looking out at the snow. Suddenly she turned. Her eyes were dancing; her dimples were riotous; she looked uncommonly like a very bad child. She held out her hand.

"Isn't it a lark?" she said gaily. "What shall we play? I feel equal to pussy wants a corner, or tag."

"Post-office," suggested the Man-Body, promptly.

"Not enough of us," objected Nancy.

"Plenty," insisted the Man-Body, firmly. "The basic principle of post-office requires only two. It's the same way with 'pillows and keys.' Would you rather play that?"

"Got any marshmallows?" asked the bad child.

"Oodles of 'em."

"And chestnuts?"

"Rather."

"We'll roast them after a while. What would you and your sister have done, if she had come? Let's pretend I am your sister?"

The man shook his head vehemently.

"No; I'd rather not play that."

"But what would you have done this morning?"

He hesitated, and eyed her dubiously, as if questioning her capacity for sympathy.

"Well—I think,—may be Nell's changed; but if she hasn't, I've an idea we'd go all over the old house and stay for a while in the school-room and nursery. Great Scott! what merry war we did raise up there! And we'd explore the attic, too. Nell adored the attic."

Nancy's dimples deepened. Her face was eager.

"I suppose it wouldn't be proper," she said, regretfully.

"Nonsense! Wilson!"

Mrs. Wilson came in from the dining-room, smiling like a fat and benign fairy godmother.

"I'm going to show Miss Reynolds the house. She likes old mahogany. Will you let me have the keys?"

She handed him a jangling bunch. "You'll find everything in order, sir," she said proudly.

They did.

When Wilson made an excursion to the school-room at twelve o'clock, she stood in the doorway and smiled with every crease in her fat face.

The open fire had been lighted and was burning famously. Old school-books, portfolios and child rubbish strewed the room.

Flat on the floor before the fire sat Nancy, toasting a plump marshmallow and burning her face to fiery crimson. Beside her was six-feet-two of boy, absorbed in spinning a somewhat decrepit top, and talking eagerly.

Wilson didn't listen, but she caught something about "a jolly good licking for it, but it was a bully swim."

"Well, would you look at them Christmas babies?" she said, chuckling to herself, as she hurried down stairs. A little later, she reappeared at the school-room door, bearing a tray. On it was a plate piled with thin bread and butter and a pot of strawberry jam.

"If you please, sir, it's time for school-room lunch," she said.

The culprits started, blushed, and gave way to shamfaced mirth.

The housekeeper beamed approval.

"Indeed, it's like old times, sir, and I'm that glad to see it."

She left them sitting side by side on the floor, gravely consuming bread and butter and strawberry jam.

When the old clock upon the stairs struck

one, they still sat there, although the bread and butter and jam had disappeared.

The boy gave the burning logs a final poke.

"Come—we haven't seen the attic, and dinner will be at two to-day. Beastly business, this tucking a stodging meal into the middle of a holiday."

Nancy scrambled to her feet.

"Twelve slices of bread and butter and jam are calculated to promote prejudice against it! Where's the attic?"

Together they climbed the steep stairs, and stood in a huge, low-ceilinged garret, whose unpainted walls and rafters, mellowed by time, were turned into a golden-brown by the sunlight, filtering through dormer windows and dancing dust motes.

With a sigh of profound content, Nancy sat down upon a horse-hair trunk.

"I've dreamed of an attic like this, all my life," she said ecstatically.

"I never knew there were so many boxes and trunks in the world. Didn't your ancestors ever throw away anything?"

The boy shook his head. "They were thrifty souls—but the savages escaped a lot, didn't they? All this truck might have gone into missionary boxes, and then there'd have

been a first-class attic spoiled to breed vanity in the natives of Booriboola Gha. Everything our family ever discarded or outwore is here—except the trousers of my early youth. After I'd worn them for a brief season of sporting-life, there wasn't enough of them left for heir-looms. My baby-clothes are in the piebald trunk in the corner, though."

He turned a key, lifted a lid, and held up, fitted on his thumb and forefinger, a diminutive lace baby-cap.

"Seems absurdly inadequate, doesn't it? They say it was distinctly becoming in its day. Wilson comes up and weeps over this trunk at frequent intervals. She tells me I was a very superior variety of baby.

"Do you like old-fashioned finery? My great-great-grandmother's wedding-clothes are in that trunk you're sitting on. Grandfather's, too. Great swells, the dear old souls were, in their day."

"Show me," begged Nancy.

The Boy struggled with a rusty lock, and finally opened the brass-bound trunk, from which a whiff of jasmine escaped as though glad of freedom.

"They say the little old lady always had a faint odour of jasmine clinging about her.

She lived to be seventy-two, but she was a coquette and a belle to the end of her days."

Nancy was on her knees beside him, her eyes shining with interest, but suspiciously misty.

"The Dear!" she murmured to herself. "The Dear——"

And the Boy, being a Man Body, and not compact of sentiment nor quick of fancy, wondered vaguely at the tender little voice thrill that paid tribute across the years to the youth and daintiness, the beauty, and coquetry, and romance of the bride long dead.

It was Nancy who lifted out the quaint, old gown of white brocade, and shook out the gleaming folds. Little white slippers, with extravagantly high heels, and huge paste buckles, white open-work stockings, a lace scarf, a fan, some girlish trinkets, a bundle of ribbon-tied letters, and several daguerreotypes were with the wedding-gown.

"It's *too* perfect," sighed Nancy. "I didn't suppose such stage properties ever did really exist."

"Grandad did a little in the line of glad rags himself," said the irreverent Boy, holding up a gorgeous embroidered waistcoat.

"Nell and I used to dress up in these things. They'd fit us better now than they did then.

I'm just about the old gentleman's size, and, they say, I look like him."

He stopped suddenly.

Nancy was looking at him with suppressed question and entreaty in every line of her vivid face. He made a wild effort to read the unspoken wish.

"You and your sister will have to masquerade again when she comes," the young woman said, patting the high-heeled slippers wistfully.

A light broke in upon the Boy's fumbling brain.

"Would you—would you like—Oh, I say, would you like to do it?" he stammered hopefully.

"I'd adore it!"

She hugged the wedding-gown in her enthusiasm, then gathered up the rest of the treasure trove and turned toward the stair, but at the top she hesitated.

"You don't think they'd mind? Perhaps it isn't fair. Do you think they'd hate to have anybody else wear——"

"They'd be glad," interrupted the Boy, with conviction. Then, as he looked at the lovely flushed face, he added: "They'd be proud!" Half an hour later, a handsome young buck, in the most elaborate of Colonial costumes, stood

beside the big fireplace in the hall, smiling whimsically down at his strapping figure in its dandified attire, and settling his lace ruffles with the air of a Beau Brummel.

Wilson had been called into consultation by Nancy, and silence reigned upstairs.

Suddenly there was borne to the ears of the waiting gallant the click of tiny heels, the swish of silken skirts.

Down the broad stairway came a dream of olden-times—a bewitching, coquettish figure in a white brocade gown, whose billowing fulness could not disguise the girl's slender grace. Yellow old lace fell away softly from white dimpled arms and shoulders; and above smiled a gay, charming face, framed in sunny chestnut hair, whose waving masses were drawn high on the head and fastened by a jewelled comb.

The vision paused on the landing, and looked down at the Big Boy, who had left the hearth-rug and stood waiting at the bottom of the stairs.

There was a brave light in his eyes, and his heart was beating tumultuously under the gay-embroidered waistcoat.

"You are be-au-ti-ful!" said the vision fervently.

He held out his hands to her.

"You are——" His voice stuck in his throat, but his eyes were eloquent. "Lucky Grandad," he murmured under his breath; and Nancy blushed as the handsome gallant, in bridal finery, led her, in courtly fashion, to the dining-room, where Wilson beamed approval of the little comedy.

Christmas dinner was in the middle of the day, and it went off merrily.

With the plum-pudding, conversation veered to personalities.

"Have I made a good substitute?" Nancy asked, demurely. "Am I a decent small sister, as sisters go?"

"Ripping!" said the big boy, with emphasis. "I wish—no, by Jove, I don't. Are you sure you haven't been bored?"

"Positive. I've been a sister to a great many big boys, but I've never had such a good time doing it."

He eyed her doubtfully.

"Still—I don't know," he began. There was a pause. "I rather wish I hadn't spent the time telling you about the swimming-hole and the bulldog and the governess. I didn't realise—I'm afraid I'll be sorrier later. You see, you are going so soon, and there's so little

time, and such a lot to say. The governess doesn't seem one of the important things. My sense of proportion wasn't in working order this morning. Now, this afternoon, we'll——"

The maid retreated to the butler's pantry. She may have been moved by the necessity of procuring cracked ice. She may have been prompted by discretion. But she came back immediately.

"If you please, sir, Watson's just been to station, and he says the road's clear earlier than was expected. The up train'll be along in about an hour, sir, and the drifts is so bad it 'll take some time to get to the station."

Having thrown the bomb, she fled.

The big boy was a Man-Body again. He was sitting up very straight, and looking at Nancy with a hurt in his eyes.

"I—knew—I'd—be—sorry," he said, slowly.

Nancy smiled at him.

"But it was a beautiful game,—and you haven't been dreadfully lonely without your sister, have you?"

He shook his head.

"I'm so very glad," she said, softly. "Of course, it wasn't my fault she disappointed you, but I couldn't help feeling guilty because

I came instead of her. And I've tried so hard to do just what she would have done."

There was a little break in her voice. It sounded like sentiment. Bobby would have sworn it was amusement.

The Man-Body sat silent.

The atmosphere was a trifle oppressive.

"I must hurry, I suppose," Nancy said, rising. He rose, too, and stood looking down at her.

"You'll be in town this winter?" she asked. "You must let us show you that we, too, can be hospitable. My father will want to thank you."

Still he said nothing.

"I should be so glad to meet the sister to whom I've been understudy."

At last he made a remark, but it sounded exceedingly irrelevant.

"And I didn't appreciate it when I did it," he said, wonderingly.

For some reason or other Nancy blushed.

The distance from the Monroe house to the station is much shorter than the distance from the station to the Monroe house. Nancy noted this fact as interesting to a statistician. Yet the train came puffing in as the brougham drew up beside the platform.

The Man-Body put his guest into a seat and had another attack of explosive silence.

"You've been awfully good," she said. "I'll never forget it. No one could have made an awkward situation less awkward or more delightful."

She introduced a period, but he didn't take advantage of it. He only looked at her helplessly. Outside, somewhere, the conductor was calling "All aboard!"

"A big brother is the nicest Christmas present I've ever had," Nancy went on, very gently. "I've never had a real one. It was a nice game. I'd like to play sister to you 'for keeps.'"

"God forbid!" the Man-Body said fervently —and swung himself off the moving train.

IN OKLAHOMA

IN OKLAHOMA

THERE are several ways of seeing Oklahoma. There is only one way of knowing the Territory.

The Congressman and the red-haired girl proved that.

They travelled from New York to Bluffville on the same car. He was looking for wheat statistics. She was in search of new experiences, and incidentally of a brother who had started a lumber-yard in Bluffville.

Both travellers saw Oklahoma after a fashion, but only the red-haired girl learned to know it. That was because the Congressman, with masculine logic, contended that the way to see a country was to travel about it, while the girl, with feminine intuition, divined that the real way to accomplish the end was to sit on a lumber-pile and look at the country through the eyes and the words of the men who made it.

There were a few Eastern women in Bluffville, but they were married, and several years in the Territory had rubbed off the old hall-

mark; so Wilson's sister made rather a sensation.

Billings, the saloon-keeper, saw her first.

"Say, boys," he announced. "There's a red-headed girl sitting on a pile of two-by-fours up in Wilson's lumber-yard, and she's a peach."

The boys were doubters. They strolled, singly and collectively, past the lumber-yard, and Billings's reputation for veracity soared above par.

Dawson wasn't contented with walking by the yard. He lighted a large cigar, by way of steadying his nerves, pulled his hat further over his eyes, and turned into Wilson's office. Half an hour later he was back in the saloon.

"She's his sister, Miss Betty Wilson, from New York, and she's the real thing," he said, with a deep conviction.

Meanwhile, the girl on the lumber-pile was feeling vaguely disappointed. She looked off across the plain, whose monotonous level was broken only by occasional farm buildings, and she wondered how one could live in a treeless country and not go mad.

Then she turned and looked down the wide, dusty main street of the town. It was flanked by rows of one-story wooden buildings, and

ended in an open square surrounding a squat brick court-house, at whose door two sickly poplars stood guard, like exiled and home-sick grenadiers. From the main street the town wandered off in forlorn little shacks and tiny, neat, cottages, dotted indiscriminately along broad, dirty roads, that bore sounding titles.

It was all ugly—drearily ugly. The girl had lunched with one of her brother's married friends, and eaten chicken croquettes and salted almonds and other Philistine fare, in a tiny square house whose good rugs and books and pictures and china seemed as much out of place as a faun in a button-factory. Betty wasn't old enough to see the dramatic interest of the surf-line, where east broke against west, and she went away from that luncheon exceedingly sorrowful. Salted almonds and embroidered doilies, and not a cowboy or an Indian within sight. Was this what she had gone out into the wilderness to see?

The street in front of the lumber-yard's office was lined with wagons and cow-ponies, and crowds of roughly clad men thronged the wooden sidewalks. On the opposite corner a number of horse-traders were gathered round a bunch of broncos, and teamsters had halted

their loaded wagons to talk with the swaggering, loud-voiced group.

Suddenly something happened, and the red-haired girl sat up. A long, lean man, in riding clothes and sombrero, stood facing three burly, thick-set traders.

"You'll swallow that or an ounce of lead," roared one of the trio, drawing a revolver.

The crowd surged back out of range.

"You're a d—— horse-thief, and I can prove it," said the man in front of the shining steel barrel. He moved quickly, as he spoke, and a bullet buried itself in the buildings behind him.

The three men lunged toward him, and he backed up against a wagon full of cord-wood. Something flashed in his hand. There was a second shot, then another, and another. Two men lay in the street. The cowboy stood unhurt, save for a red streak broadening on his cheek.

The third horse-trader brought his heavy whip-butt down viciously upon the cowboy's right wrist and the revolver spun across the road, but the disarmed man reached for a stick of wood with his left hand, and the last of his assailants went down in a crumpled heap.

The crowd closed in. When it opened out,

two men were being loaded into an empty wagon. One supported by friends, was limping toward the drugstore, and the cowboy, followed by an admiring throng, was slouching carelessly into the nearest saloon.

A loose-jointed, keen-eyed man dropped down upon the lumber-pile beside the red-haired girl.

"Pretty scrap, wasn't it?" he drawled, as he lighted his pipe. The girl recognised the sheriff, to whom she had been introduced, with due ceremony, earlier in the day.

"Aren't you going to arrest anybody?" she inquired breathlessly.

"What'd I do that for?" asked the Majesty of the Law, in mild surprise.

"Do you allow fights like that on your town streets?"

He shifted his pipe, and expectorated cheerfully. "Why, Jim licked, didn't he?"

"The cowboy did."

"That's Jim—and they were three to one agin him, weren't they?"

"Why, yes; but——"

"Well, if they couldn't take care of themselves, they needed killing, and Jim don't seem to need me to take care of him. Nobody's badly hurt, anyhow, and I can't see as I've a

call to jug anybody for that row. It kind of settled itself."

When the red-haired girl went to bed that night she was distinctly cheerful. After all, things did happen in Oklahoma.

All sorts and conditions of men floated in and out of Wilson's lumber-yard. Some of them wanted lumber. Some liked Dick Wilson, and showed it by loafing in his office. After Dick's sister arrived, they came thicker and faster than ever.

She chummed with them all, and held court on a pile of joists which made a good place from which to watch the street. Every man within a radius of seventy-five miles around Bluffville took his turn at entertaining her, but the men who most persistently acted as guide, philosopher, and friend were the philosophical sheriff and Tom Bailey, gambler, dead-shot, and Harvard graduate. Some brothers would have shied at Tom. Dick Wilson only grinned.

"He'll spoil your taste for Willy boys, Betty," he said; "but he'll not hurt you, and he knows the Territory. Don't hurt him."

So the couple sat together under the shade of the lumber-shed very often, and the gambler told the red-haired girl about the people who

passed, and about a good many people who didn't pass.

"That's Slim Jim," he said one day, as he and Betty looked down the street from their vantage point on the lumber-pile. "Did you ever meet him?"

"No, but I've seen him fight."

"That's good. He's a dabster at it, isn't he? But eating is his long suit. He can eat more than any man in the Strip, and there isn't a boarding-house keeper who will board him at regular rates; but he can't get an extra ounce of flesh on those bones.

"He's an old Texas man. He says he can go broke anywhere with perfect impunity. All he needs to do is to tell the first man he meets a hard-luck story, and pump up a cough. They put him up at a hotel and take up a collection for him."

Just at this point in the conversation the sheriff hove in sight, and came across the yard with his lazy, side-wheeler motion.

"Now, wouldn't you think that man was slower than molasses in winter?" asked the gambler musingly. "He's made out of steel wire and raw-hide. He's quicker on the trigger than any man in the country. He has a mind that works like chain-lightning, and an

iron nerve, and eyes in the back of his head, but just look at him."

The sheriff dropped in a disjointed heap upon a friendly joist.

"I was telling Miss Wilson about Slim Jim," volunteered the gambler.

"Oh!—well, it's a long story. He's a character, Slim Jim is. Don't you get stuck on him, though, Miss Wilson. He's tarnation shapely but he's married. Did Tom tell you about his marrying? No? Well, that was the only time anybody got the drop on Jim.

"You see, it happened just a little while after the run for the Strip, and Jim's never been sorry but once. That's all the time. She was a Yankee, and came down to visit her sister. There wasn't another pretty girl within miles, and the boys went clean daft about her. There were picket lines of cow-ponies hitched to her brother-in-law's fence all day and every day.

"The girl picked out two young fellows who had good claims, side by side. They were both sooners."

"What's a sooner?" asked the red-haired girl.

"Chap who gets in and stakes his claim before the Government signal is given. He has no

legal right to his claim, and any one who can prove him a sooner can turn him out and stake his claim. Well, for a while this girl couldn't decide which of the two fellows she liked the better; but, finally, she made up her mind. Both of the duffers had told her their sooner stories. She got the one she didn't want to marry to tell his story before witnesses. Then she disproved his title, staked his claim, and married the man next door. That was Jim. They've got a nice half-section, but Jim says that sometimes he feels as sick as he looks, and that he wouldn't advise any man to marry a business woman. If he were a woman he'd get a divorce, but a man can't very well do that, even in Oklahoma."

The girl looked thoughtful.

"Divorces are easy down here, aren't they?" she asked. "I lunched with the banker's wife, the other day, and she said something about the time when she and John were divorced. She didn't seem sensitive about the thing, but I didn't like to ask questions."

The gambler and the sheriff both chuckled.

"Why, bless your heart, she wouldn't have cared," said the sheriff. "She and her sister both got divorces, just before the run. You see, a man and his wife can stake only one

claim. That's a quarter-section. Now, those two couples wanted two half-sections. So they got divorced, made the run, staked four claims; and after the claims were proved, they married again. Each family had a half-section. See?"

The red-haired girl gasped. There was a direct simplicity about Oklahoma methods that startled her.

"Did many women run?" she asked weakly.

"Droves of them."

"Tell me about a run. What's it like?"

The sheriff blew a cloud of smoke.

"What's it like, Tom? You tell her," he said, turning to the other man.

The gambler crossed his knees and clasped them with his white, scholarly hands, that gave the lie to his rough clothes and hard face.

"Like?" he said reflectively. "It's like a lunatic asylum on a spree. It's like a circus chariot-race and a steeple-chase and a county fair rolled into one. It's like Judgment Day, with very few sheep in the deal. You get all sorts at a run, but three-fourths of them are has-beens. There are men from all quarters of the earth, but they've nearly all failed somewhere else and are playing for new stakes. Then there are the women who have been drudging for some one else, and are making a break for

homes of their own. Some men and women are going into the thing just for fun. Oh, they are assorted qualities and sizes, all right enough! There are lots of fine men and splendid women in the gang, but I've found that it's a good rule not to go into ancient history with Oklahoma neighbours. Now, I'm long on ancient history. My ancestors were great stuff, and I lived up to them for awhile. It was the effort of doing it that brought on a moral collapse and put me where I am."

"Did you ever run?" asked the girl. The gambler flushed.

"Well, hardly. I'm a good shot."

"But you can't get a claim by shooting."

Tom laughed.

"Oh! You mean was I ever in a run? Yes; I ran for the Strip. I didn't want the land. What would I do with it, if I had it? But I wanted experience. I got it. That run was great. Just ahead of me, when we broke away, was a fat, old darkey on a raw-boned mule. She had on a red calico dress, and she was riding astride, lamming the mule, and yelling like a calliope. The mule ran like a prairie fire, and was still going when I dropped out. I didn't run far. The plunge at the start was what I wanted. It was like going over Niagara.

It was the greatest mix-up I was ever in in my life, and that's saying a good deal. I don't know how my pony ever kept his legs."

"You staked, didn't you?" drawled the sheriff.

"Oh, yes; I staked: But a woman staked the same quarter-section, and I didn't care anything about it, so I wouldn't contest. The woman was a dressmaker, and found she was losing her eyesight; so she decided to have a go at the Strip. We rode into the filing station together, and I held her place in line for her while she got a night's sleep. She has a very decent little farm now."

"Were all the men as nice to the women as you were?" The red-haired girl's voice was soft, and her eyes were approving. He laughed.

"Well, no; I can't say that the Sir Galahad act was popular. Still, the men did try not to interfere with the women if it could be avoided."

"There were the Gateses," put in the sheriff dryly.

Both men looked amused. The gambler took out a fresh cigar.

"Tell her about them," he suggested, as he felt for a match.

"Never met Mr. and Mrs. Gates, did you?" inquired the sheriff.

"No, I think not," said the girl, wrinkling her forehead in an effort to remember.

"Well, your brother knows them. That was a case where a man and a woman contested a claim, and no politeness about it, either.

"They both made the run. Mrs. Gates was Miss Johnson then, a crisp, pugnacious Yankee schoolmarm. She staked her claim. Gates happened to stake the same quarter-section. That started the fight. Now, when a claim is contested, the claimant who has put up a shack and broken ground first stands the best show; so as soon as they had filed, Gates and Miss Johnson went tearing back to the claim to begin operations. She took a workman with her, and they knocked up a shack at the southwest corner of the claim. Gates ran his up on the northwest corner. He had to pass the other shack on his way to town.

"She had some horses, and began ploughing. So did Gates. She hated him like poison. He made the air blue every time he thought of her. The contest dragged along. Those things last forever down here. Every day the two parties got more bitter. There wasn't anything too bad for one to say about the other. When she got up in the morning she looked at the smoke coming out of his chimney, and talked to her-

self in a way that would have made her Yankee ancestors shiver. While he ate breakfast he looked across at her shack and said things that weren't fit for publication. Hating each other was their chief occupation. Between times they ploughed.

"One morning Miss Johnson got up and looked over at her enemy's shack. There wasn't any smoke. The next morning the same thing happened. She knew Gates hadn't gone away, because if he had he'd have passed her place. The third morning came. No smoke. Miss Johnson's curiosity fairly sizzled. It was too much for her. She put on her boots and went across to the enemy's camp. There wasn't any noise about the place. She stopped at the door and listened. Not a sound. She tried the door-knob. It turned, and the door opened. She pushed the door and looked in. There was only one room to the shack. On the side of the room, opposite the door, was a cot. On the cot was a man. He was tossing and turning. His cheeks were crimson. His eyes had a sort of vacant stare.

"Miss Johnson stood holding the door and watched the man. He didn't pay any attention to her. By and by she went into the room, walked over to him, and felt his head. He was

burning up with fever, and didn't notice her at all. She looked around the room. Everything was in an awful mess.

"She stood and bit her lip for a minute. That's a way she has. Then she came to a conclusion and trotted over to her shack. Pretty soon she hurried back with a medicine chest, gave the sick man some medicine, rolled up her sleeves, and waded into that room. When it was tidy she put wet cloths on Gates's head, and gave him some more medicine. Night came along, and she rolled herself in a blanket and slept on the floor. The next day she made gruel for the sick man, and kept on with the medicine. She kept that up for four days, going home only long enough to tend to the horses and cow.

"On the fifth day Gates opened his eyes and saw out of them. She was standing by him, and when he saw her he swore feebly. She set her lips.

"'You shan't die on my land,' she said.

"'It's my land, and I'll die on it if I d—— please,' snarled Gates. Then he fainted.

"That was the situation for two weeks. The woman won out. A man's stubbornness ain't any match for a woman's. Miss Johnson wouldn't let Gates die on her land. He tried

to assert his rights and do it, but he couldn't. She nursed him back to life, but they wouldn't speak to each other. When he was getting well, but couldn't do anything for himself, he used to watch her and grin sometimes. Then he would scowl.

"At last he was able to get up. She went home. That afternoon he walked in at her door.

"'I reckon you won't give up this claim?' he said.

"'No. Will you?'

"'I'd see you in —— first, but will you marry me?'

"'It's a good deal the same thing for me, ain't it?' asked Miss Johnson.

"Still, she married him. That's the way that contest was quashed, and they're as happy as turtle-doves."

"It's a funny country," mused the red-haired girl.

"It's all that," agreed the men.

A dilapidated cart, drawn by a phantom horse, wandered down the street and stopped in front of the lumber office. In it were a dignified Indian, in gay raiment, a shrinking, frightened-faced squaw, wrapped in a blanket, and a scantily clad Indian baby. The old

Indian climbed out of the wagon. As he left, the papoose wailed shrilly, and the fond father cuffed it over the head. Then he disappeared into the office.

"Old Lone Tree," explained the gambler. "He's the meanest Indian unhung. He'll lie and steal and murder, and beat his wife, and do it all with imperturbable dignity. He's a Government pet, and always comes out on top. You can shoot a white man down here, and not hear much about it; but wipe one of those dirty, vicious Indians off the earth, and you'll set the whole machinery of the Government working. Don't talk to me about the noble red man."

"Slim Jim gave Lone Tree that scar on his cheek," the sheriff added.

"The tightest hole Jim was ever in was three years ago, when six Indians held him up fifteen miles out on the Creek road. Even a drunken Injun ought to have known better. Three braves were gathered to their fathers, and three more were laid up for weeks. There was a big fuss about it, but it was finally decided that Jim shot in self-defense."

The office-door opened. Old Lone Tree stalked into the yard and across to the lumber-

pile where the red-haired girl sat. He looked her over calmly, while she blushed.

"How?" he grunted.

The two men nodded coolly. Lone Tree sat down on the lumber and smoked his pipe, looking superbly reserved and dignified. He was spectacular, but a barrier to conversation. The Indians in Oklahoma are picturesque, but not inspiring. They shake one's faith in Longfellow and Cooper. They are dirty, ill-smelling, thieving, brutal; yet with it all they do, at times, look the part.

Lone Tree finished his pipe in silence. Then he made another exhaustive survey of Wilson's sister, and nodded. She wasn't sure whether the nod expressed approval, but she offered him a smile at a venture. He accepted it without any sign of appreciation.

"Day," he grunted solemnly, and went away.

As he climbed into the wagon the papoose once more gave a frightened cry, and Lone Tree struck the little one a brutal blow with his whip. The squaw moaned like an animal in pain, gathered her baby in her arms, and sat huddled in the bottom of the wagon, while her lord and master, statuesque, serene, drove away into the sunset.

"Some day I shall kill an Indian," said Tom Bailey quietly. "I feel it coming on."

The red-haired girl's education went on apace. She lunched, and dined, and talked Paris and pre-Raphælitism with charming and cultured folk; she played euchre and wore her smart clothes, and flirted, and was reared quite after the fashion of New York or Bar Harbor, but the stage setting, at least, was novel, and there was a fascination for her in the more primitive side of the life in the rapidly disappearing Oklahoma of which she heard tales when she sat on a lumber-pile with Dick and Tom Bailey and the sheriff.

"Why Bluffville?" she asked one day. "There aren't any bluffs."

The three men looked lazily at each other. Each hoped one of the other would assume the effort of explaining. The sheriff finally came to the front.

"Didn't you ever hear how the town came to be there? We called the railroad's bluff. Some of the sooners staked it out and nabbed town lots. The railroad company decided to locate its town nine miles east, and not stop here. Then there was a fight. The trains had to be stopped here, and the boys stopped them. They tore up track and broke up bridges. The

railroad company sent a posse down to guard things. Some of the boys engaged the posse up at the north bridge while the rest of the boys blew up the south bridge. One night they moved a house, and set it squarely on the track. The engineer of the express train didn't see it until he was almost on it; so he threw his throttle wide and ploughed right through the house. The engine never left the track, but it looked more or less like thirty cents afterward, and the passengers were scared.

"People wouldn't ride on the trains, and the trainmen wouldn't run them, so the railroad company had to give in. It ought to have known better than to buck up against a crowd of Oklahoma boomers."

"How long ago was all that?"

"Five years. We celebrated the town's fifth birthday last summer, spent five thousand dollars—everything wide open, fireworks till you couldn't rest, circus, balloon ascension, show at the Opera House, four deaths from pistol-shots, scores of black eyes, drunks in bunches of twenty-five. It was a great occasion. Sorry you weren't here."

"Some day the bottom will fall out of this boom," prophesied the gambler.

"That's right," assented Dick. "We draw from seventy-five miles east and one hundred and fifty miles west now, but a railroad will cut in somewhere, and we'll go out like a candle. It's a great town now, though."

"Good place for a man in my profession." The gambler's tone had a touch of self-disgust in it.

"Why, why, wh——" The red-haired girl looked embarrassed.

"Why do I follow my profession?" finished the gambler cheerfully. "Well, why not? I'm on the square. My word's my bond, and the boys know it. It's all a gamble, in one way or another, and I'm not sure but what the avowed gambler is the only really honest man in the bunch."

The month's visit came to an end one October day. The red-haired girl kissed her brother tearfully, while all the bystanders turned their backs and diligently studied the landscape.

Then she shook hands with a large and varied assortment of men, among them Old Lone Tree, who eyed her stolidly, and grunted "Day," but who had ridden twenty miles to make the eloquent remark.

Tom Bailey was the last man to step up. His face wore the expression that he usually

reserved for a raise on a pair of deuces. A habit of bluffing calmly stands a man in good stead on some occasions.

"You've been very good," said the red-haired girl.

"Yes, I've been good. I'll probably make up for it."

Not a muscle of his face stirred, but that night he rode his pony fifty miles for no apparent purpose.

On the train the red-haired girl met the Congressman.

"It's a wonderful country," he said.

"It is," she agreed.

"Such crops," mused the Congressman.

"Such men," sighed the girl. She finds New York slow.

THE LITTLE GOD AND THE MACHINE

THE LITTLE GOD AND THE MACHINE

"THEN it's all over?" He stood in the centre of the room, looking very big and angry, and holding a diamond ring awkwardly, as though it burned his strong fingers.

The girl's slim figure stiffened. The dimpled chin went into the air a fraction of an inch further. Evidently two persons were angry, but anger doesn't make Prudence awkward. It only flushes her cheeks, brightens her eyes, tilts her chin to the advantage of its curves.

"I shall never speak to you again, Mr. Wetherell, and I forbid you to speak to me."

The voice was icy. The glance was frozen stiff.

It was absurd, in the midst of an emotional crisis, to be wondering whether a young woman's sponsors in baptism had realised they were perpetrating a joke, yet an unhappy young man found himself deciding, dully, that anything more imprudent than looking as kissable as Prudence Merrington would amount

to a misdemeanour. His anger made way before the rush of another emotion.

"But I love you so," he pleaded humbly. His voice was husky, choked. There was an Irish-setter look in his eyes that might have softened a heart of stone.

"You will remember that I have forbidden you to speak to me, under any circumstances," said five-feet-four of unrelenting scorn.

"I am not likely to forget it; when I speak to you again, it will be to answer a question from you."

The yellow portière fell behind her. The man found his hat and the front door. He swung away up the street, with boiling wrath written in the set of his broad shoulders, in every line of his handsome face. For a few moments he walked on, blindly, rapidly. Then he stopped, hesitated, and turned toward home.

Half an hour later he was spinning along a country road in a red Panhard. His jaw was still set stubbornly, and he was sending the machine along at a reckless pace. What if he did run over a collection of the natives; what if enterprising villagers did arrest him for speeding a devil-wagon; what difference could anything make now? He rather hoped he *would* be arrested. In that event he would have a

chance to fight an officer of the law, and he only hoped the myrmidon would be big and husky. There wouldn't be much satisfaction in thrashing a little man, even if it should mean being sent up for thirty days.

So the motor tore along at high speed, and the sullen-faced young man paid no attention to the unflattering comment of the folk he passed.

There was a certain comfort in the rapid motion. In earlier days, the chauffeur reflected grimly, a rejected swain always rode a horse into a lather. On the whole, it was better to be a rejected swain in an age of automobiles. Horses were too slow. Still, one could kill a horse. One couldn't kill a motor. One couldn't even make it tired. There might be a satisfaction in killing something—and he let the machine out another notch with a vicious jerk.

The sun was near the western hills before he turned toward home, and he had a long ride before him, but the fresh air rushing past his hot face and the exhilaration of the pace, had already told upon his mood and cooled his anger slightly. The whole thing was too bad to be true; and, though the engagement ring was in his pocket, it wasn't possible that things should end so. Yet she had been in earnest. They had quarrelled often before. Who wouldn't

quarrel with Prudence every morning for the sake of making up every afternoon, and having her heavenly kind and self-reproachful every evening? But this was no ordinary, promotive quarrel. This was the real thing. She was unjust—but she had some reason on her side. He certainly *had* been more or less of a brute—jealous fool!

The automobile took another staccato jump.

Yes, he had been a cad. He had to admit that—but what good could admitting it do? Hadn't he called himself every uncomplimentary name in the language? Hadn't he apologised and blamed himself and promised and pleaded and begged for mercy?—and at the end of it all she had forbidden him to speak to her.

Well, she should be obeyed. Oh, yes, he'd obey her! He wouldn't speak to her unless she asked him to do it—and she wouldn't do that. She was proud as Lucifer, and the Merrington stubbornness was a proverb.

She wouldn't speak, and he couldn't speak, and the weeks would go by and the other fellows would be making love to her, and Billy Kennedy would be getting home from Europe, and finally she'd stop caring anything about him—for she had cared. He knew that. She wasn't the kind of a girl to—well, she had

shown him she cared—and as memory gripped him, he sent his machine whirling down a long hill at a maniacal rate.

Before him a second hill rose, in slow leisurely fashion, to meet the horizon. Presumably, the motor was satiated with hill-climbing. It eyed the long slope it was charging, decided upon open revolt, and stopped abruptly, with an explosive "chug"; then, with a gentle, lingering quiver, it settled into stolid immobility.

The chauffeur followed masculinity's rules for first aid to the injured and tried "langwidge" upon the erring one. Under the choicest epithets chosen lovingly from a rich vocabulary, the motor remained imperturbably serene.

Then an irate young man, in whom fresh exasperation had supplanted earlier grievance, and whose emotions had changed in character if not in force, climbed out into a muddy road, went down upon his knees and prodded, rattled, screwed the internal mechanism of his iron steed. After ten minutes of honest toil, he mounted to his seat again and turned the lever hopefully.

An abiding and reposeful calm!

Dick Wetherell's lips moved; but, luckily for the morals of the young calf who watched the

struggle across the hedge, his sentiments were inaudible. He took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and his trousers, and went to work once more. For the moment, a broken heart was of no importance. Broken motor machinery held the stage centre—but with Dan Cupid as stage manager that situation couldn't endure. Before long, the heart once more claimed the calcium light. The perspiring mechanic looked up from his machine and pushed his cap back from his brow. His eyes were turned indifferently toward the hill which his motor had refused to climb, and a gleam of interest shot into them. Over the brow of the hill came a runabout, spinning along as though speed laws were made for slaves.

Here, perhaps, was the good Samaritan; but, as the motor came nearer, Dick saw that a young woman was running it in solitary state, and he kicked his machine viciously, in sheer disgust. What could a fool woman know about the whims and vagaries of a Panhard? He stared carelessly at the on-coming stranger. Suddenly his eyes opened wide. He stiffened perceptibly and reached for his coat.

It couldn't be—at this hour, alone, twelve miles from town and still going. Of course it was quite impossible—but he could swear to

that red automobile-coat. There weren't two girls in the world who held their heads like that. It must be—it was!

"Good Lord!" groaned the afflicted one. "And I've got to stand here looking like an awkward, muddy ass without sense enough to run an auto, while she goes ripping by and cuts me dead."

He pulled himself together and turned to his machine; but, out of the tail of his eye, he saw a fair chauffeuse give a start of recognition, draw herself up haughtily, stare straight ahead, and increase the speed of her motor.

On she came, calm, erect, unseeing. Dick braced himself for the moment when she would whir by, within reach of his outstretched hand, yet the world's width away from him.

There was a rattle, a bump, a smothered exclamation. Opposite the Panhard, in the muddy road, stood a runabout, immovable as the milestone beside its wheels. On its seat sat a *chic* chauffeuse, whose cheeks were flaming red, and whose lips were narrowed into a crimson line that trembled slightly. Dick sprang forward involuntarily. A pair of brown eyes, without a gleam of recognition in them, met his blue ones. He hesitated, remembered, and went back to his work.

The owner of the brown eyes was outwardly serene, but inwardly a prey to volcanic wrath, which was slowly but surely giving way to weak-kneed trepidation. What, in the name of all saints who look after maidens in distress, was she to do?

It was all very well to be dignified and serene in a drawing-room. There, woman was on her native heath—but in a stalled automobile, on a country road! Verily, this was the hour of the man Creature. Awkwardness and superiority had shifted places. The haughty young woman felt distinctly foolish. What was much worse, she had a strong conviction that she looked it.

Fate had played her a scurvy trick, and the situation was becoming more ridiculous with every moment.

To sit helplessly in that absurd machine and stare blankly at vacancy was out of the question. She didn't know any more about the mechanism of a motor than she did about differential calculus, but anything was better than inaction; so she clambered out into the mud, gathered up her long skirts, and peered futilely at the batteries. Then she walked around the machine, examining it with what she fondly hoped was the air of an expert, but wishing fervently

the while that looks could eternally blast and torture dumb wood and metal.

She poked the tires viciously and examined the lever with deep solicitude. The house gown, over which she had hastily slipped her cloak, when nerves and rage drove her to motoring, was trailing in the mud. Her thin-soled shoes were soaked. She climbed into her seat again and thought long, deep-blue thoughts.

She couldn't walk home. Not a farm-house was within sight. Probably she would have to start out and find one, but the walking was abominable, and the sun was almost down, and she was deep in country wilds.

Here, at least, she was safe, so long as the Person beside her stayed with his machine—and at that thought she almost made up her mind to walk. It was intolerable to owe even safety to an odious stranger.

She cast a furtive glance at the Odious One. If he had shown the smallest sign of mirth, she would never have forgiven him; but his broad back was eloquent only of stubborn pride.

It was a *very* broad back. She had never realised that Dick was so big—and strong. He looked quite equal to anything—but he couldn't repair his automobile. She was glad

of that. It would be unendurable if he should suddenly demonstrate the superiority of the eternal masculine by bringing his machine to terms and rolling off in it.

The very idea sent the haughty young woman into a panic. Oh, he wouldn't be brute enough to go off and leave her there, with the dusk coming on. Surely he wouldn't do that —nobody could—but she had been so very severe. Perhaps she had been too severe. It looked a little that way to her now. She was dreadfully afraid of the dark—and of cows. There were always cows in country roads. She had forbidden him to speak to her. Now, if she could just ask him—never! She would sit there in the dark until she petrified first. She would rather walk fifty miles, at midnight, through herds of cows, than speak to him. Surely some one would come along with a horse, and she would pay anything to have her motor towed to the village. Yes, some one was sure to come. She glued her gaze to the hilltop and waited.

The man still pottered away at his motor. He had gone around to the other side of it now, and was facing the distressed damsel. Apparently oblivious to her presence, he studied, hungrily, every line of the dear face. There

were soft bluish shadows under her eyes, and her eyelids were faintly tinged with pink. It might be the effect of the wind—it might be—his heart melted within him, but he pressed his lips firmly together. Now, what in the deuce did she intend doing?

As for himself, he had given up all hope of doing anything with his machine. There was nothing for it but to walk into town and send out for the motor; but he couldn't leave a woman alone in such a scrape, not even when the woman was heartless and cruel—and a stranger to him.

Of course, he couldn't speak to her. He would only be snubbed for his pains if he should do it; and, besides, he had promised her he wouldn't speak to her until he could do it in answer to her. Chivalry was all very well, but he had humbled himself in the dust, and she had walked over him. Now it was up to her. Evidently she had decided to wait for a chance passer-by. He would wait too.

He put away his tools, took his seat in the automobile, tucked the robes around him, and stared as steadily toward the west as Prudence was staring toward the east. His sense of humour, numbed by pain and wrath, began to

assert itself, and his lips twitched, but the chauffeuse did not look in his direction.

For five minutes, ten minutes, they sat there. Fifteen minutes passed and no rescuer appeared.

A soft drizzle set in, as the watery sun sank behind the hills. Ten minutes later the drizzle became a deluge.

The Man looked at the drabbled little woman in the runabout. She still sat stubbornly erect, but she looked ridiculously small, and as he watched her she shivered miserably.

Her veil stuck in gluey dampness to her face. From the point of her Tricorne hat a little stream of water dribbled down forlornly upon her saucy nose. Her coat soaked up the rain greedily.

Masculine pride gave way, though masculine wrath still stuck to its guns.

The chauffeur climbed out of his machine, pulled a huge waterproof coat from under the seat, and stalked, like a heavy tragedian, across the miry strip of road between the two automobiles. Without a word, he stood a small woman upon her feet, wrapped the mackintosh around her, buttoned it under her dimpled chin, and sat her down hard upon the cushioned seat.

His face was the face of a man who charges an enemy's guns.

He was rough, not tender.

No smallest trace of humility or pleading lingered about him.

He didn't care whether she liked what he was doing or disliked it.

If she would be a stubborn little fool, and sit there in the rain all night, at least she should wear that waterproof coat. The blood of prehistoric ancestral wife-beaters was boiling in his veins—and, after all, nothing could make matters worse for him than they were already.

Defiant, glowering, he turned away, but to his amazement the sleeves of his own raincoat went round his neck from behind and held him.

"D-d-dick," said a wabbly little voice, saturated with tears, shaken by hysterical mirth—"D-d-dick, why d-d-on't you t-t-take a club?"

She had spoken.

He answered her.

Under cover of darkness, a farmer drove four tired horses into the little town.

He sat alone in his wagon, but behind him he towed two automobiles. One was empty. From the other came sounds of unseemly mirth, punctuated by intervals of rich silence.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTMAS CANDLES

IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTMAS CANDLES

A SLIM, erect woman, in rather shabby black, turned into lower Fifth Avenue from one of the side streets and walked northward, slowly, but with a certain quiet self-confidence. The street-lamps were not yet lighted, but the dull end of a December day was closing in upon the world, and the black figure toned in with the drifting grays, like an impressionistic study in monotonous values.

Hurrying folk passed the woman without giving her a second glance; and she on her part showed no interest in the passers-by, though she lingered for a moment on a street-corner to watch a dull-red shaft of afterglow touch the stone carving of a church tower into sudden warmth.

As she stood looking at the flickering light, a short, fat woman, rocking down the avenue with a vigorous, side-wheeler motion, caught sight of her, stopped, stared incredulously, and threw two expressive hands into the air.

"*Mon Dieu!* It is herself—of a certainty!

Mademoiselle! You have not forgotten Françoise?"

The broad, ruddy face was beaming with unmistakable joy; the black eyes were dancing with excitement.

Elizabeth Vanderveck smiled swiftly, and the smile changed her face as the sunset light had transfigured the gray tower.

"Françoise!" she said, a trifle breathlessly. "Françoise, you remember me?"

She held out her hand and the radiant French woman took it diffidently.

"But surely. How could one forget?" she said in voluble French. "Was it not Mademoiselle whom we adored? Ah, Mademoiselle! It is to tear the heart. The son of a brewer is in our house. Me, I weep when I pass the door. The dinners I have cooked there, Mademoiselle—and for those who recognised the dinner *recherche*, the dinner of distinction. That the *parvenues* should have our house! It is said below stairs that Madame does not know Béchamel from sauce Meunière. And you, Mademoiselle? You have made the voyage. You are now in New York to stay, is it not?"

The exclamatory French woman's keen, friendly eyes had taken in every detail of the

figure before her. Even in the gathering dusk they had appraised the value of the cheap, black coat, noted the worn, black gloves, the neat but old-fashioned hat. Then they travelled to the face in which gentle kindliness mingled oddly with stubborn pride. There were lines in the clean-cut, aristocratic face that had not been there eight years earlier, but the lips were curved as proudly as ever, the head had kept its haughty poise.

"A *grande dame* always," she said to herself. "That it is to have the blood. Son of a brewer! Pah!" she snorted aloud with a sudden vehemence that made her former mistress start nervously.

"But he may have made very good beer, Françoise," Miss Vanderveck protested with a certain tranquil amusement.

The old house on Washington Square, in which she and her father before her had been born, had passed out of the Vanderveck family. She had had years in which to become accustomed to that fact. Since it was no longer the Vanderveck house, why should she care into what *nouveaux riches* hands it fell? Poverty makes anarchists, cynics, philosophers. Miss Vanderveck was too well-born for anarchy, too well-bred for cynicism, but the years since her

father's ruin and death and her own self-exile had taught her something of philosophy.

"Mademoiselle permits that I accompany her to her door? It is late for her to make the promenade alone."

Françoise was bursting with curiosity, but she could ask no questions.

Miss Vanderveck hesitated for an instant, and a faint flush rose in her cheeks, but it went as quickly as it came, and an odd little smile flickered around her lips.

"I am used to being out alone," she said simply, "but I should be glad to have you walk home with me. How has the world used you, Françoise? My lawyer told me that all the servants found places at once."

"But yes, Mademoiselle; and Monsieur l'avocat gave us the month's wages, by order of Mademoiselle. Places? With me it was an embarrassment, a pursuit. One remembered your dinners, Mademoiselle, and coveted your cook. It is in all modesty I say it. One is born with the genius. One deserves little credit. I considered the offers. The Belmore family had need of both a cook and a butler. They are not the true aristocrats, but they are not without grandfathers, and they have money. One must make concessions—and

certainly is was an advantage that they needed, too, a butler. Surely, Mademoiselle remembers Watkins?"

Miss Vanderveck nodded. "The imposing Watkins! No one could forget him, Françoise."

"Exactly, Mademoiselle! Me, I had become used to Watkins. He was of an intelligence, of a sensibility, and of a figure—*Mon Dieu*, what a figure, superb for a butler, he has! So that I would not lose him, I married him. We are with the Belmores, who are now on the Riviera, while we guard the house here. They are not of the highest. I have already said it. But what would you? It is a compromise."

The two women had turned off the avenue, and walked westward along a side street, until the desirable residence district was far behind them. Finally, Miss Vanderveck stopped before a new and cheap apartment-house.

"I live here," she said with a touch of hauteur. The pride in her face had driven out the softness, yet she spoke gently. "I will not ask you to come up, Françoise. It is late. You were kind to see me safely home, and it has been pleasant to meet you; but for the people who knew me in the old days I do not

exist. You will oblige me by remembering that, Françoise."

This suggestion was a royal command.

"But, Mademoiselle, you will surely permit that I, Françoise, come to see that you are well."

There were genuine tears in the imploring eyes, and Miss Vanderveck relented. "Yes, you may come."

"And for the Christmas, Mademoiselle? You will be alone, is it not?"

The pale, thin face looked a trifle paler, a trifle thinner. Yes, she would be alone.

"If Mademoiselle would but do me a favour, for the sake of the old service," stammered the French woman. "Watkins and I, we also are alone. It is not good to pass the Noël so without the *fête*, the gaiety. Not to prepare a Christmas dinner! I, Françoise, to fold my hands when the day of dinners is come! It would be of a sadness, of a waste, Mademoiselle. When one has the genius one owes something to the world. One must find expression. If Mademoiselle would but permit that we should offer her Christmas dinner——"

Miss Vanderveck's face was forbidding, but Françoise stumbled desperately on.

"There would then be a true Christmas *fête*

for us, Mademoiselle—to be allowed to serve you, to prove that we have not forgotten your goodness, that there is the service of love. From my heart I could plan a dinner. I feel now the inspiration within me."

She stopped for breath; but Miss Vanderveck did not speak. If the thing had not been incredible one would have said that the firm lips were trembling and that there was a mist in the proud, brown eyes.

Françoise took heart of grace.

"Mademoiselle would think of nothing, know nothing. Me, I would prepare everything. Watkins would serve—and we would be of a happiness. For a Christmas present to us, Mademoiselle, you will say 'yes.' Is it not?"

She stopped, dismayed by her own hardihood. No thunderbolt fell.

Miss Vanderveck stood looking at her with a beautiful light in her eyes.

"You are a good woman, Françoise—a loyal friend. I am glad to know there are such as you. It seems I have misjudged the world."

Françoise laughed a gay, little laugh of relief and delight.

"*Eh bien*, it is understood?"

"Yes."

"You will not give a thought to the Christmas

dinner? You will not look into the dining-room, the kitchen?"

"I promise."

"Oh, Mademoiselle, I am proud, grateful. Watkins, too, will be enchanted. You are an angel, Mademoiselle. It shall be a dinner for an angel—with the tastes worldly. Good-night, Mademoiselle."

She was gone.

Miss Vanderveek went up the narrow stairway and into her apartment. She took off her coat and hat and gloves in the dim light that filtered through the windows. Then she lay down upon the couch, and for the first time since she disappeared from a world in which no Vanderveek had ever been pitied or patronised, she cried softly.

Meanwhile the French woman who condescended to minister to the palates of the Belmare family, when that family was not globe-trotting, was hurrying back toward Fifth Avenue as fast as two hundred pounds of flesh and embarrassing shortness of breath would allow. She must see Watkins. She must tell him the news, and in order to avoid explosion, she must tell it soon. News like this was too effervescent to be retained with safety. It must be shared at once.

As the fat little woman turned into the avenue, a man came down the steps of a big brick house and paused for a moment to light his cigar.

Françoise, scurrying Watkinsward, was yet not blind to the merits of other masculinity. Her glance took in the tall, immaculately clad figure appreciatively. It was a portly figure—a figure coquetting with *embonpoint*, yet lingering on the hither side of discretion's boundary-line.

There are men who exude prosperity at the pores, and Dudley Broughton's prosperity, while not aggressive, was subtly and inextinguishably self-assertive. He had been born to the material good things and he had not thrown away his birthright. Possibly he had allowed it to assume undue proportion in his scheme of life; yet the man was no sensualist—merely self-absorbed and self-indulgent, after the manner of men for whom life has been made comfortable.

Françoise, looking at the handsome, indifferent face, illumined by the lighted match, gave a dramatic start. This was her day of sensations; and, being French, she appreciated it. Eight years had not passed since she had seen Dudley Broughton. In point of fact, she had

passed him on the street only a few days before, but then he suggested no romance to her quick brain. Now he was a possibility. There had been a time when he seemed a probability, but that was long before, when the old house on Washington Square held its own, and the servants' hall buzzed with gossip about the mistress and her admirers.

For Françoise even a possibility had its charms.

Why turn one's back upon Heaven-sent opportunity? If he did not care to know, no harm would be done. If he had heart—this Monsieur Broughton — he would rejoice. Mademoiselle had commanded that no one should be told. Oh, la, la! If one did only what was commanded the world would be of a slowness.

"Monsieur,"

Dudley Broughton took his cigar from his lips, lifted his hat slightly, and stood courteously waiting, without a hint of recognition in his face.

Françoise spurred her courage.

"Monsieur would not remember—it is not to be expected—but in the old days he was gracious enough to praise my *sole au vin blanc.*"

"Françoise," he said. "I make you my homage. There is no other cook in New York who could equal it."

A smile flashed into the man's face. "Françoise, you were with the Vandervecks. I remember you perfectly. I remember the sole, too. I begged to be presented to you."

"Yes, Monsieur; and Miss Vanderveck sent for me. Ah, Monsieur, it is because of her that I have spoken to you. I apologise, but when the heart speaks one does the thing impulsive. Me, Monsieur, I am *all* heart."

She pressed a chubby hand against her breast.

Dudley Broughton's placid face had sharpened slightly.

"What do you know of her?" he asked.

The shrewd little French woman heard the ring of interest in his voice and mentally applauded herself.

"I have but just left her, Monsieur."

"Here? In New York?"

"Of a surety, Monsieur."

"She is living here?"

"Since the first of the month."

"But where? How?"

He pulled himself up suddenly. One is not a boy at fifty, and one does not make a confidant

of a stranger whom one meets on the street-corner.

But Françoise was uncorked. The story gurgled out, and the man who listened, knowing Elizabeth Vanderveck well, and belonging to the world upon which she had turned her back, understood, as the good-hearted woman of another class and of different traditions could not understand.

"*Voilà*," finished Françoise. "*Voilà* the story. It is of a meanness, that apartment-house, and she had the air poor—but always the aristocrat. Already I have meditated upon the dinner, Monsieur. It shall be of the best. Watkins and I have made the bank account."

"If you would allow——"

The man's hand went to his pocket, but the French woman's face flushed.

"Pardon, Monsieur, no. It is I, Françoise, who offers the dinner. Mademoiselle permits. But it is this for which I ventured to stop Monsieur. I knew him to be an old friend of the family, and I said to myself, 'To dine alone is not right, on the Noël.' Then the dinner—more than one should appreciate it. Perhaps Monsieur Broughton would have the kindness not for me, but for the old friendship——"

She stuck fast, tangled in embarrassment—

then went on breathlessly; "If you could but add to the pleasure—to the surprise—if you would but dine with Mademoiselle on Christmas Day. I would have all things ready; it would be like a dinner out of the past. It is not good that one should see no old friend on the Noël, Monsieur!"

The man was as embarrassed as she—but with a difference.

"I should be glad to eat your dinner, Françoise, but—Mademoiselle—it would be an intrusion. She has never sent me word—she would have let me know if she had been willing I should come."

He was stammering like a boy.

"The pride, Monsieur—only the pride. A friend laughs at the pride. And on Christmas Day—it is the season of good will, is it not—the season of the soft heart? The Christmas candles would melt the pride, Monsieur. You will come?"

He hesitated, then squared his shoulders.

"Yes, Françoise. I will go."

"*A la bonne heure!* There shall be *sole au vin blanc.*"

"You will give me the address, and I may send flowers?"

"To me, Monsieur. It is to be a surprise."

She gave him the address.

"*Au revoir*, Monsieur. You are of a kindness. It shall be a success, that Christmas dinner."

She hurried on to Watkins

Dudley Broughton stopped a passing cab and drove to his club. He could think better at the club. In fact, he found that he could do most things better at the club.

If it had not been for the excellence of that club, he might, perhaps, have——

His thoughts went back to the days when the Vandervecks lived in the old Vanderveck house and he was exceedingly at home there. He could remember Elizabeth's *début*. She was a pretty girl, a trifle cold and proud, even then, but he admired her—tranquilly. He was past enthusiasm over *débutantes*, and already dancing under protest. It was on her father's account that he had drifted into the position of friend of the house. At least, that was what he had thought, but the *débutante* matured into a lovely woman, and he still admired her—tranquilly. She had stood as his standard for womanhood. He had felt that if he should marry, his wife would be like her. Probably he would marry some day—some far-off day. One ought to do that sort of thing, and Elizabeth—but one was so comfortable at

the club. Marriage entailed responsibilities, curtailing of freedom, domestic difficulties, trouble with servants, bad dinners. At the club one had what one wanted, and one paid one's dues. That was all.

The gossips grew tired of connecting his name with Miss Vanderveck. Elizabeth was cordial, serene. She had admirers, a host of them, and each one went away, in time; but Dudley Broughton still dined at the house regularly on Sundays and dropped in at all hours. He was a selfish man, not a vain one, and it never occurred to him that Elizabeth loved him. Of course he loved her. He accepted that fact as he accepted the sunsets, but things were very well as they were.

He was in India when the crash came; and months went by before he heard of the financial failure, with the ugly suggestions of disgrace hanging round it, and of Peyton Vanderveck's sudden death. He wrote to Elizabeth at once, but he had never heard from her. She had been courageous enough to do her own surgery, to walk off the stage before she could be elbowed from it. No one knew anything about her, save the family lawyer, and his lips were sealed.

Society gossiped, wondered, and then forgot the Vanderveck bankruptcy, in the Chittenden

divorce. Even the real friends forgot, in time.

Thinking the story over as he dined, Dudley Broughton realised that he, too, had practically forgotten, though he had been sadly shaken up and hurt when he found that the one woman he admired—tranquilly—had dropped out of his life and made no sign to him. He had never realised that she had not understood—that she had not believed he would care.

Now she was in New York. He would see her—and something stirred in him that surprised him mildly.

He ate his dinner in perfunctory fashion, roamed into the smoking-room, ensconced himself in a big chair, lighted a good cigar, and sat staring at the ceiling. Only once during the evening did he speak. A friend slapped him on the shoulder.

"My boy's half-back on the Yale team, Broughton," he said proudly.

Broughton lowered his gaze from the ceiling.

"Eh, what? Oh, yes. Nice boy?"

"Well, rather. I'm going down to the station to meet him now,"

"How many children have you, Courtney?"

"Four; and they're the finest ever. My small girl makes her *début* this winter, and she's a

winner. Why the deuce don't you marry, old man?"

He walked away.

Broughton relapsed into silence. After a time he put on his coat and hat and went to the theatre. For the first time the club seemed big and cheerless.

. . . . . .

When Elizabeth Vanderveck opened her door in the dusk of Christmas day, suggestions of festivity smote her nostrils. The scent of American Beauty roses mingled with an odour of highly seasoned cookery. Violets and lilies-of-the-valley defied the kitchen to do its worst.

For a moment the mistress of the place looked puzzled. Then she remembered. Evidently Françoise and her Watkins had taken possession while she had her long walk. Her lamps were lighted. Her little front room was full of flowers. Surely Françoise could not have remembered her preference for valley lilies, yet there were masses of them on the little tea-table.

The curtains between the tiny parlour and the tinier dining-room were drawn, and Miss Vanderveck smiled at the mystery in which this odd Christmas celebration of hers was shrouded. Still smiling, she sank wearily into

a low chair, and, closing her eyes, sat quietly with the perfume of the lilies caressing her senses and old Christmas times drifting through her thoughts, until a subdued clatter of china and glass, behind the curtains, roused her.

She must dress for her dinner. Depression and untidy hair would be a poor return for the friendliness of Françoise and Watkins. The occasion was festive; well, festive it should be, if she could make it so.

She went down the hall and into her bedroom, put away her coat and hat and turned to her mirror. The woman she saw there did not suggest gaiety. Her face rose pale and weary above the sombre black of her gown, and her brown hair was brushed smoothly back from her brow. A sprinkling of gray showed in the brown, and Miss Vanderveck eyed it with gloomy disapproval. The disapproval extended itself to include the black gown. What place had black at a Christmas dinner?

A gleam of inspiration dawned in Miss Vanderveck's eyes, and with a certain shamefaced determination she opened a trunk, that stood in one corner of the room, and recklessly tossed its contents on the floor. Down at the bottom she found the thing of which she had been in search, and as she shook it out the gas-

light rioted over the glowing silken folds of rose colour. She had kept no other gown of the kind. What had rose-colour dinner-gowns to do with her life now? But this gown had associations. It had been a favourite with old friends. It—well, she had kept it.

She rose to her feet with the brilliant burden in her arms, and looked from the gown to the mirror, from the mirror to the gown. Eight years had not made her lamentably old. She had a fancy to see what the vanities could do toward wiping out the traces of those dull years.

Her hair first. She let down the soft, brown mass, and drawing it loosely to the top of her head, fastened it in soft puffs and allowed it to wave fluffily about her face. The effect was encouraging, and the faint colour in her cheeks deepened. After all, forty-two was not an appalling age, and why shouldn't one be good to look at even if there was no one to look?

She slipped into the shimmering pink gown. It was out of date as fashions go, but it had been a picturesque gown in the first place, and it kept its art value. Miss Vanderveck's sloping white shoulders rose bare from out of a foam of fine old lace. They had always been

good shoulders. Eight years had not changed them.

The forlorn figure in rusty black had faded out of the mirror. In its place was a slender woman with a delicate patrician face, who carried her head in regal fashion and wore a superb gown with nonchalant grace.

"You could no it even now," she said enigmatically, and in the shadowy background of the mirror men's faces came and went. She had ruled right royally in the days when the pink gown was new.

She turned and trailed her rustling skirts down the narrow hall to the little drawing-room. She was living over again those days when the world went well.

In the doorway she paused, and from the corner of the dimly lighted room a man came to meet her. She was not surprised. He was a part of the dream, and she held out her hands to him graciously, as she had given them to him in the old days.

"Dudley," she said happily. There was no surprise in her voice—only tranquil acceptance of a great good.

He held the slim white hands and looked at her with a vague wonder in his eyes. This was not the forlorn woman Françoise had described.

This was Elizabeth at her best. He had forgotten that she was so lovely.

"Dinner is served."

Watkins stood in the dining-room doorway, dignified, imposing, outwardly imperturbable, though curiosity seethed within him.

Miss Vanderveck looked at him. He, too, was a part of the dream. She took her guest's arm and went with him into the little room where for a month past she had eaten her simple and solitary meals. Silver and cut-glass, fine napery, great bowls of roses flouted the close, crowding walls and the cheap furniture, and Watkins loomed large, irreproachable, serene, though the incongruity of his stage-setting might well have shattered a less masterly repose of manner.

The kitchen door was slightly ajar, and through the crack peered an appreciative eye, unseen but seeing.

Miss Vanderveck sank into her chair and looked across the roses at the man who sat opposite.

"It is good," she said simply, and his eyes repeated her words.

"You were unkind, unfair."

She nodded. "Yes; it seems the pessimists are all wrong. The world has a heart."

No more explanation. Out of the experience of years they understood, and the woman's pride melted, with the man's selfishness, in the flame of the Christmas candles.

Françoise was proven prophet.

They ate their oysters—those two who were finding themselves—and they did justice to course after course of a wonderful dinner.

Françoise was more than a prophet. She was a cook. Her dishes were worthy to belong in the dream.

It was a gay little dinner. Even Watkins lost a shade of his portentous solemnity and consented to see humour in the fact that there was barely room for him to squeeze between sideboard and table, though up to the *entrée* the wound to his dignity rankled sorely.

Miss Vanderveek's cheeks grew pinker each time she met her old friend's eyes across the roses, and her voice held a tremulous little note, though she talked and laughed lightly.

The man watching her heard the thrill in her voice and saw some inner thrill stir into ripples the serenity of the steady brown eyes. The restless discontent that had wakened when he knew that she had come back into his life rose and beat against his indifferent egoism, and a touch of eager boyishness crept into his

face and manner. How a man could waste the years, he thought, and walk blindly side by side with happiness!

Watkins put the coffee upon the table and discreetly withdrew. Françoise had prompted him, and, when he appeared in the kitchen, she cast herself upon his manly breast and wiped away a tear with a dish-towel.

"I have done my best," she said dramatically. "It is now in the hands of *le Bon Dieu*. Such a dinner should have made it of an easiness for him."

In the dining-room there was silence as the door closed. Then Miss Vanderveck lifted a glass to her lips.

"To the old days!" she said softly.

Dudley Broughton shook his head.

"To the coming days!" he amended. His hand went out across the table and found hers.

Two servants sat in the little kitchen and waited anxiously. An hour went by. Ten o'clock came.

"'E's 'avin' trouble," said Watkins.

Françoise was more hopeful.

"It is that they have forgotten. That is the good sign," she murmured.

The bell rang sharply, and Watkins sprang to the door with an eagerness foreign to his

habitual calm, but he entered the dining-room with his usual noiseless dignity. Behind him appeared the fat form and shining face of Françoise, prophetess, culinary genius *dea ex machina*. She had forgotten to close the door.

Dudley Broughton looked at the couple and smiled. His chair was on Miss Vanderveek's side of the table.

"Watkins," he said, and there was a huge content in his usually dry voice, "are you and Françoise pledged to the Belmores after their return next month?"

"No, sir."

Françoise had come forward and was beaming at her husband's side.

"We think," said Mr. Broughton, with a certain lingering emphasis on the "we," and a look at the woman beside him, "we think we shall need you after we come back from Florida."

A VISITING PEER

A VISITING PEER

THE Howisons lived in a New York suburb, but that was the worst that could be said of them.

Their own particular suburb was much like other suburbs of the better sort, and the Howison house was a centuplet, but it was a very jolly little house, for all that.

"Five minutes from the station, natural shingles, white woodwork, adorable veranda—and *no stained glass*," was Mrs. Howison's description of the place. Howison always mentioned a porcelain tub and a yard big enough for a tennis court. There were minor details, but they have no place in a short story.

Bridget and Ellen were not minor details, but they, too, are somewhat foreign to the tale, save as promoters, for they left, at an hour's notice, on Saturday morning. Wilkins, the milkman, had something to do with the precipitate decampment—not in his official capacity, for he was an unexceptionable milkman; but he was also a bachelor, and no bachelor should drive a milk-wagon. It gives him too much

scope for conquest. Mortal man could not reasonably be expected to be adamant, in the matter of backdoor overtures; and Wilkins was not only mortal, but a good-looking and impressionable mortal, with fine Catholic tastes.

Bridget and Ellen were Catholics, but their tastes were restricted, and when it came to sharing Wilkins' affection, they were Protestants.

Each made well-chosen and perfectly intelligible remarks concerning the other's antecedents, character, and susceptibility, and concerning the milkman's real feelings. Each refused to live under the same roof with the other for another hour. Neither would stay in the house after being accused of wanting to stay so that she might throw herself at the milkman's curly head. Bridget took the trolley to Newark. Ellen boarded an Erie train.

When Howison came home, at four o'clock, he found his wife sitting among kitchen *debris*, like Marius among the ruins of Carthage.

"They've both gone," she said forlornly. "I've just been looking over the broken glass and china."

Howison is a lover as well as a commuter. He did the most comforting thing possible under the circumstances. Two years' experience with

domestic tragedies had perfected his method, and Mrs. Howison finally admitted that there was balm in the possession of an angel husband. Then they laid the table for two, Howison protesting, the while, that he always preferred a cold supper on July nights, and that for the promotion of sheer gastronomic bliss he would choose cold lamb and tomato salad before any other *menu* that had ever swum within his ken.

At five o'clock, arrayed in summery fine linen, they sat within the screened cage that is the Jersey version of veranda, trying to forget that they would have to cook their own Sunday-morning breakfast.

"Now, if we were in town, we could go around the corner to a restaurant, or have breakfast sent in, or——"

"Why, Teddy!" interrupted Mrs. Howison, with tearful reproach in her tone.

Teddy slid to base.

"Oh, of course, darling, I wouldn't be happier in town. This is really the ideal thing. A fellow does want a big kitchen, and linen-closets, and a laundry, and room for his party clothes."

There was a glibness in the recitative that suggested quotation, but his face was earnest and sincere.

"Servants do stir things up a bit out here," he went on; "but one can't expect anything to be perfect—except one's wife."

He resorted once more to unanswerable argument.

"Teddy, the neighbours certainly will see us!" Mrs. Teddy protested.

"Let 'em," urged the valiant Howison, who was not only in love with his own wife, but shameless enough to be proud of it. "By Jove, who's that?"

The station hack drew up before the Howison gate. From it descended a formidable length and breadth of rather noisy-checked tweed, which resolved itself into a large man built upon the massive lines of early English architecture. He pulled from the dilapidated hack two huge bags, which had apparently been made to match him, and gave the driver a tip, which surprised that free-born son of American independence into lifting his hand toward his hat with a servile intent, which he checked in time to save his self-respect. The "made in England" traveller turned toward the house.

Mrs. Teddy made a queer little noise in her throat, and clutched her husband's arm despairingly.

"It's—Oh, Teddy, it can't be—yes, I believe —Teddy, it *is* Lord Cheltenham!"

Mr. Howison looked from his wife to the approaching guest and back again.

"Yep," he admitted weakly.

"And no cook!—and Saturday!—and we told him to come at any time!—and he gave us such a gorgeous time at Cheltenham House!—and he's used to servants just heaped up in all the corners."

Her voice was growing smaller and smaller, as the enormity of the situation sank into her soul.

"What *will* we do?" she wailed *pianissimo.*

"Buck up," suggested Teddy with a gleam of masculine sanity.

"Yes, of course. He was so good to us over there. He'd be dreadfully cut up if he knew he had come at such an inconvenient time. Don't tell him, Teddy. We'll manage some way—but don't begin lying until you have to, Teddy. We must figure out something we can stick to consistently. I'm not a bit good at improvising. Isn't it positively sickening?"

"Damn the luck!" murmured Mr. Howison firmly.

"Thank you so much, darling.—Why, Lord

Cheltenham! This is a delightful surprise. How lovely of you!"

She was on the steps now, with both hands impulsively outstretched and her pretty face aglow with glad welcome. Behind her loomed Teddy, cordiality written large upon him.

"This is what I call friendly, Cheltenham. Let me take those grips. When did you land? This morning? And you came right down to us? Well, that was exactly the thing to do, and I tell you we appreciate it."

The Peer's ruddy face was wreathed in smiles.

"I knew you meant it, when you told me to come any time, without warning. Wouldn't dare take that at its face value with every friend, old man. Mrs. Howison, it's absurd for a young thing like you to pretend to be a matron and housewife. Pretty place you've got here! Don't bother with those bags, Howison."

"There isn't a man-servant on the place," announced his host joyously. "This is the land of democratic simplicity, Cheltenham. You'll have to get used to it. I'll just take these things to your room. You'll want to tub and freshen up a bit after this hot day in town."

Lord Cheltenham followed him up the stairs.

Five minutes later, Howison sought his wife, and found her sitting on the floor before the open refrigerator.

She waved a limp chicken at him as he appeared.

"We'll have to have our Sunday dinner tonight. You can telephone and have things for Sunday brought over this evening—if Jones has anything left, at this time Saturday night. If we were living in town now we could——"

"Why, Katherine!"

Her husband's tone was steeped in reproach, but his eyes grinned. Mrs. Howison's dimples responded to the grin.

"Yes, I know, but don't make me laugh, or I'll cry. Get Nell on the 'phone, that's a duck. She simply must help me out of this. What's the use of having a sister in town, if she doesn't understand first aid to the injured?"

"Here's Nell,'. called Howison, after an interval in which his wife did record-breaking stunts in the line of dinner preparation. She dropped the can-opener and hurried to the telephone.

"That you, Nell? Both maids have left.—Yes, this morning.—Awful? Well, you don't know how awful it really is. Lord Cheltenham's here—Yes, honestly—came fifteen minutes ago.

—I don't know, a week, probably.—Get dinner myself? There's nothing else to do.—I shan't tell him the cook's gone. I'll just mention that the waitress has gone home ill, and laugh it off, —What?—Yes, I'll wait on the table myself, and make a sort of a lark of it, you know. I'm going to wear that new pink frock.—Ruin it? Maybe I will, but it will help some. He won't notice the dinner so much. The skirt does hang like a dream, you know. I'll have to be trailing back and forth to the kitchen and that sash and back drapery will leave a good impression behind me every time I disappear.—What?—Why, of course, the kitchen floor is dirty, but one has to make sacrifices in an emergency like this.

"Now listen. I want you to send me two maids on the early train to-morrow—Saturday night? Yes, I know that. What's that? Why, of course, the intelligence offices are closed by this time. That doesn't make any difference. I have to have maids.

"Get them of the caterer or the Salvation Army, or somebody. I don't care anything about their references or their morals. Just somebody for a day or two, until I can find regular ones. Pay anything for them.

"You can't?—I could if I were there.—Well,

then send me yours.—Cool? No, I'm not cool; I wish I were. You can get along without them. You haven't a live lord on your hands. Tom and you can go to the hotel, and we'll pay your bill.—Won't come? Oh, yes, they will come if you offer them enough.—That's a dear. You fix it with them. I'll do as much for you some day.—There won't be any mistake?—Take them and put them on the train, Nell. They might escape at the last moment.—The six-thirty train.—Yes, it is a little early, but these summer mornings are so beautiful——

"And say, Nell, send along anything nice you happen to have in the house.—Yes, that would be lovely. We haven't a scrap of cake.—What's that? That fine old Burgundy? Tell Tom he's a cherub. We'll bring Lord Cheltenham up and have a dinner and roof-garden spree for you all——

"So much obliged. Don't let anything happen. Good-bye."

"All right, is it?" Howison asked anxiously.

"I guess so. Nell didn't seem as altruistic as she might have been. She wouldn't have given in for anything less than a Peer. Do go and lie in wait for that Peer, Teddy, and take him off somewhere.—Walk him over to the links. If they only had a good club-house and

restaurant, wouldn't it be a help? It's foolish to pick out a suburb where there isn't a sure-enough country club!"

As Howison and the Peer started down the walk, Mrs. Howison called her husband back.

"Be awfully late to dinner, Teddy, and say something about it on the way home. That will give me time to get things ready and dress, and I'll be amiable and forgiving when you apologise."

"Shade of Sapphira!" murmured Howison—but he kissed her.

Lord Cheltenham saw the golf links thoroughly. His host didn't spare him a single bunker. They even played a hole or two before the shadows grew too long, and after that they joined fellow golfers on the small veranda of the diminutive club-house and imbibed large quantities of a refreshment that didn't require the services of a *chef*. Finally Lord Cheltenham began to lose his self-confidence.

"I say, Howison, do you think all this mixing is quite wise in a pilgrim and a stranger? They're good, you know, but they're devilish complicated."

And Howison, having secretly consulted his watch and seen that its hands pointed to eight-ten, let the Peer off.

"We'd better be hiking along, I guess," he said. Then, openly looking at his watch, he started violently.

"By Jove! It's after eight, and dinner was at seven. We must hustle."

"Haven't had your dinner yet?" chorused the fellow golfers. "Lucky you have a good-natured wife, Howison," added one of the group.

"Oh, she'll be all right!" Howison asserted with fine nonchalance, "but the dinner may have gone off a peg or two. Come on, Cheltenham."

They sprinted homeward. Mrs. Teddy, having seen them afar off through the kitchen window, rushed to the veranda and rose indolently from the hammock to greet them, with gay reproach, when they appeared.

Lord Cheltenham eyed the pink frock and the face above it and, out of the fulness of much "mixing" and of æsthetic appreciation, heaved a mighty sigh of content.

"I tell you this is living," he said, with warm approbation. "Simple, natural, charming, no formality and fuss and feathers—no dinner dress for the men of the house—no row when a fellow's an hour late. My *chef* would give notice if I'd serve him such a trick."

"Ours doesn't mind," said Howison.

"She must be exceptional."

"She is." Howison's tone was saturated with conviction.

Some are born cooks, some achieve cookery, and some have cookery thrust upon them. The wife of a suburbanite comes under the last head, but there are different ways of bearing the cross. Mrs. Teddy had made the most of her opportunities. She could cook.

The dinner was an unqualified success, from the strawberries nestling in their own green leaves on a mound of cracked ice, to the superfine Turkish coffee. The Sauterne cup and the pink gown would have softened the heart of the most savage critic, and Lord Cheltenham was not disposed to criticise. He watched Mrs. Teddy flitting gaily about the room and making merry over the defection of the waitress. He followed with his eyes the last flutter of the floating gauze sash each time it disappeared into the butler's pantry. He noted the fashion in which the pretty waitress looked down at Howison as she waited for him to take the dish she offered, and he thought of the lonely formal dinners at Cheltenham House.

He grew mellower and mellower, more and

more genial, more and more approving. He told stories ; he cracked jokes ; he announced disloyally that American women and American cooks were far superior to the English articles.

If there had been one more course he would have sung, but at half-past ten Mrs. Teddy suggested adjournment to the veranda and served coffee there.

"You are to be congratulated upon not losing your cook as well as your waitress," said the well-fed and enthusiastic Peer. "That would have been a loss. Don't let anything happen to the cook, old man."

"Heaven forbid," said Howison fervently.

Mrs. Teddy laughed, but when one laughs as charmingly as Mrs. Teddy, it isn't necessary to have an excuse for doing it.

They sat upon the veranda, hour after hour, while the men smoked a great deal and talked a little, and the woman talked a great deal and smoked not at all.

Lord Cheltenham was happy. He had dined to his liking; he admired pretty and vivacious women in general and Mrs. Teddy in particular; he found Howison a good fellow, with an unexceptionable taste in cigars; he was wide awake and contented. Why go to bed?

And Mrs. Teddy, with a nightmare vision of innumerable dirty dishes piled higgledy-piggledy into a chaotic kitchen, and of an uncleared dining-room table haunting her, and with the possibility of a servantless to-morrow looming before her, was gay, amusing, *insouciante*, to the edification of her admiring husband, who puffed at his cigar and mentally voted her a dead-game sport.

At two o'clock a glimmering idea that bed-time was approaching filtered through the Englishman's brain.

"I'm afraid I've been keeping you up," he said, without sign of remorse. "It must be getting on, you know."

Mrs. Teddy rose, but without suspicious alacrity.

"Yes, I dare say you are fagged after a long day of knocking about. Thoughtless of us to let you sit up, but it is so jolly to be visiting with you again."

Her husband feared she was overdoing it. The Peer looked as though he would linger longer if urged.

"I'll take Cheltenham up, my dear. I suppose the room is all right."

"Oh, yes, I think you'll find everything quite right."

Mrs. Teddy spoke with a detached air, as though she herself hadn't gone over the room with a microscope before dinner and made sure that everything was in order.

When Howison joined her in the kitchen, at 2:15, he apologised for delay.

"Thought I'd better stay until he was far enough along toward bed so that he'd be safe for the night. Wait till I get my coat off and my sleeves rolled up, and I'll help."

Until four o'clock a young woman in a white wrapper and a young man in shirt-sleeves toiled and perspired in comparative silence. Mrs. Teddy had run down. Howison was walking in his sleep.

"I didn't know there were so many dishes in the world," sighed Mrs. Teddy, as she wearily stacked the last saucer.

Howison sat down on the table and wiped his face with a dish-towel.

"Hospitality is a gracious thing," he said in honeyed tones. "If I live to fulfil my one ambition, I'll entertain the whole House of Lords. It's a great thing to have a visit from a peer, Katherine."

"*You* may call this a visit—I call it a visitation!"

Howison conceded her point.

"Suppose we now go and seek a little well-earned repose," he urged.

"I've got to set the table and get everything ready for breakfast. There's no telling whether those maids of Nell's will come."

Teddy threw the dish-cloth defiantly at the face of the kitchen clock.

"I will never desert Mrs. Micawber. Lead on."

He looked at the tired-faced, drabbled little woman in the white wrapper, and his attempt at hilarity fell through.

"It's a beastly shame, sweetheart. I'm awfully sorry. Wish the duffer had sunk in the Atlantic on his way over! It's dreadfully hard on you, and I——"

Mrs. Teddy turned upon him fiercely.

"Teddy Howison, don't you dare to be nice to me or I'll howl!" But when they finally trailed wearily up the front stairs, his arm was around her and she was not howling.

At the head of the stairs they paused, and Mrs. Teddy laid her finger warningly upon her lips.

"He might think we were burglars and get up," she whispered.

They glanced at the guest's closed door.

Two pairs of sleepy eyes opened wide, two

mouths dropped open as though moved by one spring. Mrs. Teddy gave a strangled gurgle of emotion and buried her face upon her husband's shoulder. Howison stood for a moment staring blankly at the four pairs of shoes, arranged in a neat row, outside of Lord Cheltenham's door.

Then he, too, was overcome by emotion. He dropped down upon the top step of the stairs and swore softly, fluently, while Mrs. Teddy had violent but comparatively noiseless hysterics in his arms.

Later he retreated to the bath-room and polished the shoes, but his sense of humour had reached the limit of its elasticity, and he could not sympathise with his wife's continued and unseemly mirth.

When Lord Cheltenham, arrayed in white ducks, irreproachably shod, satisfied with life, enraptured with America, strolled down stairs, at nine-thirty, Sunday morning, his hostess, all in crisp white and with a fresh rose tucked into her belt, was lounging in a big veranda chair, and rose to greet him. There were the faintest of shadows under her eyes, but her vivacity and cordiality were unimpaired.

"Teddy's late," she said laughingly. "He's a terrible sluggard—but here he comes."

Howison was amiable, but his general appearance suggested that the world was too much with him.

"Look a trifle seedy, old fellow," commented the Peer. "Now, seven hours' sleep ought to be enough for any man,"

"Yes, it ought," agreed his host, eyeing with a certain chastened pride the very superior polish upon his guest's russet shoes.

A trim maid appeared in the doorway.

"Breakfast is served, Madam."

The Peer screwed his monocle into his eye.

"You have a new waitress?"

"We have," said Mrs. Teddy.

There was a jubilate in her tone.

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"NOW am I in Arden. When I was at home, I was in a better place."

Nancy made the quotation woefully and emphasised it by a vicious kick at a fat toadstool.

Priscilla nodded understanding.

"Yes, it is slow, isn't it?"

"Slow?" Nancy's tone held a world of comment. "Slow! Why, beside this sort of thing, solitary confinement in a dungeon keep is one mad round of gaiety and dissipation. And yet there are beings who put in lifetimes in the country!"

"But I thought you liked the country."

"Of course I like the country—in its proper place. The country is all very well, as a stage-setting. The very best times of my life have been beautifully bucolic—but what's the use of a stage-setting without any *dramatis personæ?* What's the country good for without a man?"

Priscilla assumed an expression of pained protest, though her eyes twinkled.

"Shocking, my dear, shocking! Sighing for men, when you have the murmuring rills and carolling birds and spreading oaks——"

"Spreading fiddlesticks!" interrupted Nancy rudely, and then both girls laughed and moved so that the spreading oak would more effectually screen them from the sun.

"Besides, I'm not sighing for men," Nancy went on. "I'm only wishing for a man—just one ordinary man, even a quality below ordinary —one little, little man. Of course, I'd rather have a big one, but I'd accept even a little one with effusive thanks."

Priscilla looked at her chum, who was lying stretched out upon the moss, her hands under her head, her white frock cool against the deep green and clinging lovingly to the slender figure. The sunlight sifted through the leaves playing in her warm brown hair and casting soft, flickering shadows over a charming mutinous face, in which dimples and smiles lurked visibly amid the whimsical petulance.

"I can think of a large group of men of assorted sizes, any one of whom would scramble here, if you'd agree to accept him, even without effusiveness."

Nancy shook her head.

"I'm not offering a permanency, my dear,

and what would we do with one of the collection if he came? Aunt Hannah wouldn't allow him on the place, and there's no hotel within miles. I do think Aunt Hannah might at least have selected a young farmer and 'hand' to run the farm! She's collected a valuable group of antiques now, hasn't she? I've always been given to understand that there were stalwart, handsome sons of Anak on farms. Jeremiah and Hiram are a fine Anaky couple!"

"Nancy, you were crazy to come. You said you wanted to get away from people and be in a place where it would be green and quiet, and where you could loaf and invite your soul."

"Well, so I did; but my soul has sent regrets, and that changes my point of view. What I yearn for is the beach at Coney Island. There are more fellow beings—of a kind—to the square inch there, than in any other place I can think of. And to think I let you in for this, Pris. You could have gone to Kennebunk for this month, and I persuaded you into coming to Aunt Hannah's with me."

"Oh! that's all right—I quite like it," averred Priscilla loyally. "I'd rather be with you here than at Kennebunk without you."

"And how could I know she was a fossilised dragon—and that the lovely farm was a thousand miles from nowhere? Daddy hadn't seen her in forty years, and she wrote an awfully nice old-fashioned letter, and I sort of pictured a lavender silk, old mahogany, spinet, Canton china situation. My literary sense will be the death of me yet. I presented Aunt Hannah with a cherished romance and a gentle, sentimental spinsterhood—and here she's a whale-bone and raw-hide Yankee manager, who hates men worse than she hates anything except dust and wastefulness! As a matter of fact, I believe she thinks men were just a bit of dusty wastefulness on the part of the Almighty."

"Never mind," said Priscilla soothingly. "We'll squirm through July and escape by the first of August."

"Miss Reynolds! Miss Reynolds!"

A high, piercing voice, with a fine nasal twang, came shrilly through the quiet sun-steeped air.

Nancy sat up suddenly.

"There's the light-footed Maria. What do you suppose she wants?"

"Oh, Miss Reynolds!"

"Here, Maria."

Nancy was on her feet now, tall, slim, pretty, expectant.

A spindling, slab-sided girl, in a shapeless brown gingham frock, plunged heavily through the willows and paused panting on the other side of the stream near which the girls were standing.

"Please, Miss, your aunt's had a telegraph. She's that stirred up she broke the blue-and-white teapot. Her niece, Molly, up at Springtown, she's goin' to marry somebody, or somethin', and your aunt, she's goin' right up to stop it. She's puttin' on her black alpaca, and Hiram, he's gettin' up a horse, and she's goin' on that two-fifty train. She wants you to come in right away, so she can tell you what to do over Sunday. She won't be back till Monday afternoon, anyhow."

Maria stopped for breath.

"Hooray for Molly!" murmured Nancy, as she and Priscilla made their way gingerly across the stepping-stones.

"Do you know her?"

"Never heard of her. You see Aunt Hannah isn't my aunt—is no relation at all. Father's brother married her adopted sister. They do say Aunt Hannah would have married father, if he hadn't been a sprinter. There'd be

nothing for it but flight, if she once made up her mind."

The two girls hurried across the meadow, through the orchard, and up to the rambling white house, before whose box-stoop stood two huge sentinel elms. On the stoop, framed by the straight trunks of the giant trees, was a gaunt, angular figure in a black frock and bonnet of a year long dead.

A horse, that in some vague way resembled the woman, and was harnessed to a light spring-wagon, waited at the side of the house, and an elderly, hollow-chested, loose-jointed man, in blue jean and a torn straw-hat, held the reins.

"Girls, I've had bad news!"

Miss Martin's voice was crisp—her tone was grim.

"I'm going away for three days, and you'll have to get along somehow. I've told Maria what to have for meals, and written it down, so you'll see she does as I told her. The paper is in the first right-hand pigeon-hole of the desk in the sitting-room.

"I've put away the best china. That girl would be sure to break things, if I wasn't around with my eye on her. Be careful about the lamps, and don't forget to bolt the doors.

Don't you give Hiram any victuals, Maria Elkins. He's engaged to board at the farmhouse with Jeremiah's folks, and I don't 'low to feed him.

"I'm sorry I have to go off, but there isn't any time to lose. I guess I'll see whether a niece of mine's going to marry an Irish papist!

"Won't listen to her folks? Well, she'll listen to me! So'll he!

"I'll be back Monday afternoon at five. Good-bye.

"Now, Hiram, you make that mare go as if she weren't ploughing by the day!"

The wagon rattled down the drive.

"Maria, don't you forget to fold the counterpanes, and don't talk to peddlers."

The parting admonitions were wafted back upon the summer breeze.

Nancy sat down limply upon the stoop and mopped her brow.

"Wish I could telegraph Molly," she said fervently. "Think of having an Irish papist to run away with! I'd welcome a Hottentot Swedenborgian!"

"It's rather jolly being left alone," suggested Priscilla.

"Well, rather. Next to having an agreeable man on the place, not having Aunt Hannah is

the most consolatory thing I can think of. Maria, what's that that smells so good?"

"Baking—berry pies and doughnuts and bread and coffee-cake. There's floating-island made, too—and baked beans, and Miss Martin, she 'lowed she'd have a ham cooked to-morrow. There's fried chicken for supper."

"I will say for Aunt Hannah that she doesn't starve us," Nancy admitted generously. "Come on, Pris, let's go up to the falls. I left a book up there this morning."

The two girls followed the winding garrulous brook past the willow-fringed meadows, into the woods, where it swirled noisily around great moss-covered boulders, and foamed over miniature rapids, dropping occasionally into silence in deep brown-hearted pools in the shelter of the rocks or fallen logs, or in the curves of shelving banks. Rank fern and damp, sweet-smelling herbs grew thickly along the path, the sunlight fell green-golden through the leaves, and warmed the velvety mosses into sudden flashes of vivid colour. The splash and gurgle and ripple of the running water were light-hearted wood voices.

Nancy stopped for a moment to draw a long breath of content.

"After all," she admitted, spreading out her

hands in a little inclusive gesture, "this isn't bad. There are moments when I can conceive of an Adamless Eden, but I could never consider giving up the serpent. Now, a man would probably see in the brook only a trout stream. He'd fish and fish, and be absolutely unappreciative of the æsthetic side of nature. A man——"

Her harangue broke off short with a snap. She clutched her comrade's arm.

"There *is* one!"

"A tramp!" gasped Priscilla tremulously.

"Tramp, indeed! Those are city-built knickers, Priscilla Pilsbury. When I get back to the house, I shall pour a libation of elderberry wine to all the gods."

"Let's go back now."

Priscilla was distinctly uneasy, but Nancy was cast in more heroic mould.

"Go back now! Perish the thought! Going forward is just beginning to be interesting. He's been fishing. Tramps don't carry fishing-tackle and read books bound in limp leather. I wonder if his face matches his back. Dreadfully long back—isn't it?—stretched out on the bank that way. Come on, Honey. It's time for us to be discovered."

She went swiftly forward, her face as guile-

less as a baby's, serene unconsciousness of the stranger's presence writ large upon her.

The young man heard the crackle of twigs, lazily lifted his chin from his hands and his eyes from his book, and, for a second lay there, staring in blank surprise at the apparition moving toward him. Then he scrambled hastily to his feet, took his pipe from his mouth and his cap from his head, and confronted Nancy.

Her startled-fawn pose was a triumph. She was surprised, tremendously surprised. Any one could have seen that, but she rallied with gentle dignity.

"I beg your pardon," stammered the Man-Body. "I'm afraid I frightened you."

Nancy blushed. She always blushes when she is interested in a *rôle*. It doesn't mean anything, but it is most effective.

"Oh! it's quite all right," she said sweetly. "Of course, it did startle me. We are so used to having these woods all to ourselves that we had forgotten there were other folk in the world."

"Then I'm trespassing. It's my normal state nowadays, but there's no way of knowing, and the stream was an alluring proposition for a fisherman. I'm awfully sorry. You don't feel faint or anything, do you?"

Nancy didn't feel faint.

Priscilla had come up, and was eyeing the other young woman with an expression 'twixt severity and apprehension. She is never quite sure what Nancy will do next.

The stranger took the initiative. He was extremely good to look at. Even Priscilla admitted that. The corduroys were worn and shabby, the soft felt hat was battered, but the man was evidently a gentleman, and the frank boyishness and good nature in the handsome sun-browned face were disarming.

"I wonder if you'd mind telling me," the eyes were still fixed upon Nancy's blushes and a faint touch of dull red had crept into his own tanned cheeks. "You see, I'm a stranger here. I've been tramping, fishing, and sketching and loafing for three weeks, and I seemed to have missed my road to-day. I wonder if you'd mind telling me how far I am from Millville?"

"Twenty miles," said Nancy.

"Oh, I say, I *have* made a mess of it! I was to put up there and take a bit of a rest on Sunday. Might I trouble you to tell me what is the nearest town?"

"Martin Centre is our post-office."

Priscilla noted a 'gleam of inspiration in

her chum's face, and her apprehension deepened.

"Is it far from here?"

Nancy considered.

"About ten miles."

She had generously presented four miles to the road between the farm and the village, but Priscilla held her peace.

"Really! Well, that's rather a pull for a tired man. Is there a hotel at Martin Centre?"

Nancy shook her head.

"It's a shame to bother you, I'm imposing on your kindness, but do you know whether there's any sort of a farmhouse in the neighbourhood where they might put me up over night, or over Sunday? I'm dead tired, and I'd like to fish this brook, if I could get permission."

High resolve set its seal upon Nancy's politely interested face.

"We take summer boarders," she said. "Our room is vacant just now, and if you think you can be comfortable——"

Priscilla's mouth shut with a snap, and some inward spasm shook her.

"Nancy, don't you think——" she began feebly, but Nancy brushed the coming objection aside.

"We will show you the way to the house, and you can look at the room," she said in a businesslike manner.

The incredulous delight that had surprised the young man's mouth and eyes faded discreetly, and he pulled himself together.

"My name is Wetherell," he said courteously. "When I'm not a tramp, I am a New York lawyer. It's awfully good of you to be willing to take me in."

Nancy's dignity was imposing, though not glacial.

"This is my cousin, Miss Pilsbury. My name is Reynolds. Our aunt is usually with us to superintend things, but she was called away for Sunday. It is too bad she will not be at home to attend to your comfort."

A vision of Aunt Hannah in the *rôle* of ministering angel plunged Priscilla into a violent fit of coughing, but Nancy's serenity would have put a mid-May morning to shame.

The three turned back along the wood path, Priscilla leading the way. Her heart was in her throat. Only a sublime confidence in Nancy's generalship kept her from absolute panic. This prank was really too mad. Behind her Nancy and the tramp chatted gaily. Mr.

Wetherell, of New York, was convinced of the efficiency of his guardian angel; Nancy is never so radiant as when she is doing something reprehensible.

In the orchard, Priscilla found a chance for a word in the sinner's ear.

"It's dreadful!" she murmured. "Honestly, Nancy, it's too bad. Do get rid of him! Maria will tell, and your aunt will be crazy—and anyway, it's shockingly improper!"

"Yes, isn't it?" chuckled Nancy appreciatively. "I wouldn't have missed it for worlds! Don't worry about Maria. She adores me. I'm the one love of Maria's life up to date. She'll be mute as a fish, and he'll go Monday morning, and Aunt Hannah doesn't come until Monday afternoon. To think that I called country life slow!"

The Tramp was installed in the parlour on a horse-hair chair, with a much embarrassed Miss Pilsbury opposite him on the slippery sofa, and Nancy disappeared kitchenward.

After a long ten minutes she reappeared, fairly radiating good humour, and gave Priscilla an encouraging nod.

"The maid will show you the room, Mr. Wetherell, and if you think it will be comfortable——"

"A foregone conclusion," interrupted the Tramp.

"You may take possession," Nancy went on. "Ask Maria for anything you find wanting. I believe the room is quite in order. We have supper at six-thirty."

Maria, looking like a hypnotised idiot, appeared at the hall door, Mr. Wetherell followed her upstairs, and Nancy, subsiding upon the sofa, hugged Priscilla ecstatically.

"And I only asked for a *little* man! He's six feet, if he's an inch, and such a duck. Did you notice his eyes, Pris?—and such a jolly mouth—and such an appreciative soul! Oh, this *is* a good world."

"Aunt Hannah will find out."

"It will be worth it—I intend to tell her myself. Maria would be hung, drawn and quartered before she'd tell. She thinks it's like a book."

"You're ruining her morals."

"Bother! It will do her all the good in the world. She's had a very dull-gray time. A splash of purple will brighten up her landscape, and, anyway, my dear, you wouldn't turn a weary traveller away from your door. Hospitality is a sacred duty—I pointed that out to Maria. She's going to bake biscuit."

The supper was an unqualified success. Nancy hadn't resurrected the best china—even her recklessness had its limitations—but the fried chicken and biscuit and honey were good enough to give an air even to stone china, and Nancy, in a pink-and-white organdie frock, poured tea in a fashion that made any other luxuries absolutely superfluous. The Boarder succumbed without a struggle, and Priscilla, who knew the symptoms, resigned herself to a lonely Sabbath.

"I'll not be dragged around with you," she announced later to Nancy. "This is your party, and you can manage it. I'm going to read Cotton Mather's sermons. They're on the what-not, and I've read everything else in the house."

She finally consented, under strong suasion, to sit on the stoop for a little while, before taking to Mather, but she beat an early retreat and read in the lighted parlour, where a murmur of conversation punctuated with laughter floated in to her from the moonlight world outside.

At half-past nine Nancy came in.

"Mr. Wetherell is going to stay out and smoke for awhile. He'll bolt the front door when he comes in. Pris, you look like a sulky

cherub. Stop it and come to bed. I'm tired, but very happy. I'm afraid the truly good must find life awfully dull. Now, I know this isn't fair to Aunt Hannah, but she has no right to be such a cantankerous crank that she drives people to desperation. I'll tell her after it's over, and clear you and Maria. She can't more than flay me alive, and after all, there's no real harm in this affair. With you here, it's proper enough, even if it isn't according to Dame Grundy, and anybody can see at a glance that he's a gentleman—and a charmer. He says your profile is pure Greek, Pris."

Priscilla rather fancies her profile, herself. She relented slightly, and by the time the two had climbed the stairs together, harmony reigned. The Boarder, smoking out under the elm-trees and thinking long thoughts about golden-brown hair and gray eyes and dimples, smiled sympathetically as muffled bursts of laughter from behind the curtains drawn across a lighted window disturbed the hush of the night.

It was a merry world. Even a New York lawyer could recognise the fact.

Priscilla's anticipation of a solitary Sunday was justified by the event. At the breakfast-table, Nancy assumed that the boarder would

wander forth alone in quest of the wily trout, and sweetly reminded him that dinner would be ready at one.

Mr. Wetherell promptly developed deep-rooted objections to fishing on the Sabbath, and, of course, no young woman of fine feeling could urge a man to set aside moral scruples.

Nancy is a young woman of fine feelings.

Happening to mention casually that she intended going to the falls after the book, whose quest was abandoned on Saturday, she was surprised, but charmed, to find the lawyer's morals imposed no veto upon Sunday strolls.

She begged Priscilla to join the expedition; but her chum greeted the proposition with the silent scorn it merited, and retreated to the hammock and the society of the Reverend Mather.

Nancy stopped to speak to her *en route* for the falls, and found her distinctly aggrieved.

"Do you like me in this hat?" asked the offending one blithely. It was a most delectable hat, with its wild-rose wreath and its flapping, loose-woven brim, through which the sunlight sifted; but Priscilla refused to consider it.

"I thought you were going after a book?"

she said with a stern glance at the volume tucked under Nancy's arm.

"So I am, but it's Henry James. What could I do with Henry James and another man on a summer morning like this? I'm taking Browning. You really can't miss it on Browning. There are critics, Pris, who deny that Browning is a true poet, but nobody can deny that he's a promoter."

"Evidently you don't share Mr. Wetherell's views on the subject of Sunday angling."

Nancy looked at her chum reflectively.

"Priscilla, my love, a godlike calm goes better with a Greek profile than savage sarcasm. If I had that profile I'd live up to it."

She joined the waiting Boarder, and Priscilla grinned over the Puritan divine's most vivid picture of damnation. It is hard to be consistently wroth with Nancy.

From indications at the noonday meal, Priscilla judged that Browning and Nancy had done their worst. She spent the afternoon in the hammock, with her back turned upon a couple who read poetry under a tree in the orchard.

Supper was, so to speak, a love-feast. Even Maria recognised that fact, and delivered a

heavy wink to Priscilla from behind the rapt Boarder's shapely head.

The front stoop was "paradise now" for the evening, but Priscilla fought June bugs beside an ill-smelling lamp in the parlour.

When Nancy came in, she looked thoughtful and was uncommunicative. Priscilla recognised the stage, and braided disapproval into every twist of her hair, as she prepared for bed amid a vast silence.

"He's going to-morrow at noon," volunteered Nancy, as she blew out the light.

No comment from the figure upon the extreme inside edge of the bed, with face turned toward the wall.

Nancy sighed.

"I never was a favourite. My father never smiled," she quoted with doleful fervour.

Priscilla imitated the unappreciative "father," and conversation languished.

When the Boarder appeared in the dining-room on Monday morning, he carried his bulging knapsack with him. Priscilla was civilly taciturn. Nancy was gently pensive, smiling delightfully, but with obvious effort.

Mr. Wetherell deposited the knapsack in a vacant chair.

"I thought I might as well pack up and not

waste any of the morning," he said with such unrestrained gloom that for an instant the pensiveness slipped its moorings and Nancy's smile lapsed into a frank gaiety, which she promptly suppressed.

"You are going to help me get those water-lilies?" she asked.

"Of course."

"The pond is quite a mile away."

The distance evidently did not weaken his resolve.

"But it's a beautiful walk. You'll enjoy it."

Priscilla smiled grimly into her oatmeal-bowl. She doubted the prophecy, but she was convinced that Nancy, at least, would enjoy the walk.

The Boarder gazed across uneaten porridge and bacon and eggs, at the pensive young Person in the blue linen frock.

"You aren't eating your breakfast," the young Person said reproachfully.

He admitted the fact, but made no apparent effort toward reform.

When breakfast ended, the trio wandered out upon the front stoop, Priscilla revolving plans for a lonely morning, Nancy talking lightly about the weather, the Boarder mute.

From the road came the thud of horse's hoofs and a clatter of wheels guiltless of rubber tires. Nancy eyed the approaching cloud of dust listlessly.

"We do need rain," she murmured, then suddenly every muscle of her face and body stiffened into consternation.

Through a rift in the dust she had caught a glimpse of a familiar erect figure in black. She seized the Boarder's arm wildly and dragged him inside the door.

Amazed, bewildered, he stared at her terrified face and allowed her to push him toward the dining-room.

"Miss Reynolds!—Nancy!—what is it?" he exclaimed.

"Aunt Hannah!"

Horror saturated the two words.

Priscilla, who had followed the retreating party, allowed a pardonable "I-told-you-so" gleam to lurk for one moment in her eyes, then incontinently surrendered to sympathy.

"Out the back door," she gasped.

Nancy nodded.

"You stop her out in front. Sandbag her, if you can't do it any other way!"

Opening and shutting his mouth futilely, in vain effort to demand explanation, the dazed

Boarder took the knapsack, which Nancy thrust into his hands, and was hurried on into the kitchen, where Maria stood over the steaming tubs.

"Maria, Aunt Hannah's coming. She's most here!"

The handmaiden's lower jaw dropped like a plummet.

"Oh, Lord!" she groaned.

"Take him out through the grape-arbour and across the berry-patch. She can't see you there. Come back just as soon as he's in the woods."

"B-b-b-ut," stammered the Boarder.

"Oh, go—please go—if you don't want me to cry; run! Maria'll explain. Oh, *do* go!"

Maria clutched him with a strong, soapy hand.

He went, unceremoniously, uncomprehendingly, but recognising in a vague way the urgency of quick action.

"But I may write to you? I must write to you!" came back over his shoulder, as Maria hustled him toward the sheltering arbour.

"Yes, do write, but run, now. Oh, please run!"

He ran.

Nancy interrupted the tale of Molly's short-

comings, to which Priscilla was listening with an absorbing interest, whose subtle flattery had warmed the narrator into eloquence, and detained her on the front stoop.

"Molly's eloped!" announced Priscilla.

"No!" Nancy's face expressed mingled horror and incredulity.

Aunt Hannah untied her bonnet-strings viciously.

"Clear gone, when I got there. She's crazy, plump crazy! She comes out of my will to-morrow. So does her mother She might a stopped the girl, if she'd a had a grain of sense. No born fools and Irish papists are going to get anything out of this farm!

"How'd you get along?"

"Nicely." Nancy's face was crimson.

"Where's Maria?"

"In the backyard."

"Well, I'll go change my dress."

She vanished into the bedroom opening off the parlour. The two girls went out into the open air to draw long breaths.

"Nancy, you said you were going to tell her."

Priscilla was as stern as an accusing angel.

Nancy fanned herself feebly with a microscopic kerchief.

"I will, dear, honestly I will. I've danced, so I'll pay the piper—but it would be superhuman to pay spot cash on demand like that. I need a season of fasting and prayer before I take my life in my hands—and this was so—so sudden!"

She twinkled, but relapsed into contrition.

"I'm sorry, Pris, really, I'm sorry. It *was* horrid of me. I'm a wretch. I wish I hadn't—but wasn't it a heavenly interlude? 'How mad, and sad, and bad it was, but, oh, how it was sweet!' He does so appreciate Browning, Pris. I wonder what sort of a letter he writes?"

Maria tiptoed around a corner of the house like a stealthy hippopotamus.

"S-sh!" she hissed. "He's gone to Millville. He gave me five dollars. S-sh!"

With the gesture of a stage conspirator, she disappeared.

"As I prophesied in prehistoric times," said Nancy, "a touch of purple does brighten Maria's landscape wonderfully."

GOWNS AND A GOBOLINK

GOWNS AND A GOBOLINK

"YOU are quite sure it is becoming?" Nancy eyed herself critically in the long pier-glass between the front windows.

"Positive," asserted Bobby, with profound conviction.

Nancy turned around and looked across her shoulder at the back of the trailing gray gown.

"You don't think—Bobby, you truly don't think it makes me look fat?"

There was tragic appeal in her tones.

Bobby smiled.

"Just about as fat as a willow wand," he suggested. Then he added, hastily and conscientiously—"but shapelier."

Nancy seemed tremendously relieved.

"You know, Bobby, I've been called 'plump' three times this winter. The first two times I didn't mind it, because women did it—thin women. You know how that sort of woman says, 'Why, dear, you are getting positively —plump.' A long hesitation before the 'plump,'

Bobby. That means, 'I can't forgive you for not having as many angles as I have.'

"But the third time it was a man who called me plump. That made me shiver, because he thought he was being complimentary. I've dieted ever since. It's a dreadful thing to have a long line of fat ancestors and live in their shadow. The sword of Damocles was cheering compared to it.

"You don't think that perhaps a big chou and ends of pale-yellow chiffon—the nice spring crocusy yellow—would improve me?"

She was pathetically appealing. Bobby's smile developed into a laugh.

"You know that I don't think anything from any one of the four seasons could improve you," he said with emphasis.

"So bad as that?" sighed Nancy. "Then I may as well stop struggling."

She tucked herself into the corner of the huge Davenport, carefully pre-empting the pale-yellow cushions.

"Take the bright pillows and sit quite at the other end of the Davenport, Bobby. Then you'll not spoil the colour scheme, and can get enough perspective on it to really enjoy it. You see, I'm proud of this gown."

"So I imagined," murmured the man who came often.

"It's so unexpected."

"Unexpected?" echoed Bobby.

"Yes—and I have eight others just as unexpected. It's beatific, Bobby. You shall see them at the rate of one a week. You couldn't stand the rapture oftener than that.

"I have four new hats, too, and an opera cloak, and gloves, and shoes, and slippers, and a spring coat, and—and things." Her voice had a dreamy suggestion of hasheesh ecstasy.

"But how did it happen, Nancy? Any one dead?"

"No; that's the beauty of it. We didn't kill a soul. It was the tidiest, most tactful bit of work my guardian angel ever put through—and yet so thorough, so beautifully thorough. If that angel were subsidised, I'd raise his salary."

"I don't understand," confessed Bobby hopelessly.

"Of course you don't. You don't know the Man."

Bobby sat up suddenly, a vitalised interrogation point surrounding a suppressed exclamation point.

The girl among the pale-yellow pillows

smiled at him sweetly. She has a special smile for those moments of Bobby's, a guileless, innocent, happy, creamy smile, that filters softly through the explosive silence and has a particularly exasperating effect upon the bad-tempered young man.

"You remember the railroad wreck," she said at last. Bobby's face softened. He nodded.

"I haven't really told you about it since I came back. I haven't had a chance. First, you were away, and then there was always some one here, and——"

"It was good of you to telegraph." Bobby's voice was very low. "I'd have been desperate if I had seen the papers first."

"Well, you see, the Man asked me to whom he could send telegrams, and Daddy and Mother made such a meagre list, I put you in for the moral effect." She looked at him and relented.

"Then I—well, I just happened to think that I might never have seen you again, and I wished I had been nicer that afternoon, and I thought I'd like to telegraph to you—no, Bobby, you can't begin to see the good points of this frock at close range. What Daddy calls the 'toot and cymbal' is the thing."

Bobby came back to the subject of the new gowns, but his face had cleared.

"What did the wreck have to do with a gray gown?"

Nancy spread her hands in a comprehensive gesture.

"Everything—everything."

"Tell me about it."

"There was a Man——" began Nancy.

"There is always a man," interrupted Bobby rudely.

"Exactly. Didn't I say that my guardian angel deserved a raise of salary? If I should die before you, Bobby, I wish you would see that that simple but comprehensive phrase is graven on my tomb—'There was always a Man.' There you have history, comment, and appreciation crystallised. It's an ideal epitaph. This story doesn't exactly begin with the Man, though. You know I started to Priscilla's wedding. My wardrobe was awfully shabby, Bobby. It was between seasons, and I had worn things hard, and Daddy had been bothered about business, so I wouldn't for worlds have asked him for anything new.

"I didn't even have a fresh frock for the wedding, but I tucked the old things into my

disgracefully battered trunk and told myself I didn't care.

"I was the only woman in the Pullman car all afternoon; but there were men—several men. One of them was very good to look at, Bobby. He sat across the aisle from me. I sighed every time I glanced at him. It's dreadfully hampering to be well-bred, Bobby. The Vermont blood in me has interfered with a great deal of simple pleasure. Now I know girls—girls who are much better than I, girls of whom every one approves—who never take a trip without having some delightful adventure. They always meet strange knights who do the most charming things for them and turn out to be friends of the girls' friends, and rich or titled, and susceptible, and prodigal of candy and violets and theatre-boxes. I've travelled untold miles, and I never met a man in my life, unless he was dragged up to me by some one of unimpeachable reputation, and formally introduced. It isn't that I am good. It's that I'm either stupid or unfortunate. I freeze solid when I mount a car platform, and even a Pullman car steam-heat doesn't thaw me.

"So I sighed when I looked at the Man across the aisle. He seemed so full of possibilities. Yet I knew I should never meet him.

"There's where I misjudged that guardian angel, Bobby. He's an angel of resources. He understands my prejudices and limitations. He has the force and invention to cope with them.

"I didn't go out to the dining-car early—I wasn't hungry, and a late dinner makes the evening shorter. I hate evening on a train. The Man wasn't hungry either. Everybody else in the car was. I sat and stared out of the window. It was a black night, but the trees were blacker than the night, and huddled together like frightened gobolinks as we flew by. I was positively grateful to every light that flashed out of a farmhouse window. Slavery to convention had lowered my spirits. I felt depressed by my own propriety. Confidentially, Bobby, there's nothing that depresses me like being truly good under temptation. Some people get a glow out of it. They don't deserve any praise. I always know I'm going to be sorry, and yet I'm good in spite of it. That's what I call noble.

"Nobility sometimes has its reward. I've been known to doubt that; but now I know it is true.

"I was watching a little light on a hill ahead

of us. Suddenly the light turned a somersault and exploded like a Roman candle.

"The explosion was horribly noisy. It wasn't any respecter of person or propriety. It stood me on my head and batted me against hard woodwork and threw me down in a dislocated heap.

"When I settled down once more I opened my eyes. Everything was dark. Moreover, everything was, apparently, upside down. I felt around, and decided I was sitting on a window with my back against the plush seat. Something heavy lay across my lap. It was soft, and had on a rough-frieze suit. Suddenly it sat up, looking like one of the gobolinks, and rubbed its head.

"'Well, I'll be ——' it said.

"'It looks as though you'd have a chance to find out whether you'll be,' I suggested. The Gobolink gasped.

"'Oh, by Jove. I beg your pardon.' It moved a foot or two away, quite to the other side of the window.

"'Are you hurt?' it asked.

"'No; I'm worse than hurt. I'm offended,' I said. You know I don't have hysterics, Bobby; but I was threatened. In the first place, I was scared; in the second place, I was

shaken up; and in the third place, there was the good-looking man sitting on a window with me at the bottom of a Stygian pit. Talk of having a man thrown at one's head! My friends had tried doing it; but this was the real thing. At last I had undeniably met a strange man on a train.

"He wasn't badly hurt, but had hit his head an awful whack, and been stunned for a minute. He seemed a trifle dazed for a few minutes longer. Then he rose to the situation.

"'We're in a ditch,' he said. I told him the idea had occurred to me. He asked me if I was afraid to stay alone for a few minutes, and I lied stoutly. I wanted him to sit right there and hold my hand tightly—not as a matter of sentiment, Bobby; merely by way of human encouragement—but I let him go. I couldn't hear a sound. All the other cars and passengers might have been ground to powder. Still, there was no reason why, if I happened to be rescued, I should look like a fright, so I straightened my hair and got my red-flannel powder-rag out of my chatelaine-bag. There was something very comforting about that powder-rag, Bobby. It was so every-day commonplace. It reassured me. It was absurd to think of dying while one could sit comfortably

on a window and use a red-flannel powder-rag.

"Still, I was glad when the Gobolink peered over the side of the car seat. He was tremendously cheerful, said we were all right and in no danger at all, but that I'd have to climb over two seats to get to the passageway, and then lie down and squirm through the passage. He pulled me up, and I did credit to my gymnasium teacher. The passageway wasn't so easy. You know how wide those little passages around the stateroom and smoking-room are. Well, just turn them on their sides, so that their width is their height, and then try to go through them. There's only one way. I shall always look at a turtle with respect. It isn't so easy as it seems when one watches him. I sent the Gobolink through first. Not even fear and haste could reconcile me to doing a human turtle-act before any one.

"I was sorry it was too dark for real appreciation of his method. He's a dignified man with rather gray hair, and a face like a Roman senator. I'd enjoy seeing him do turtle. After he got through, I lay down flat and squirmed through myself. That passage seemed a mile long, Bobby. I'm so sorry for all the things that have to go hitching along through

life on their stomachs. But, then, I suppose they are built for it, and don't find it as inconvenient as I did.

"When I got through, we climbed up out of the ditch. There were crowds of people around. Two cars were standing on the track. Three more were toppled over. The engine was in the ditch. The baggage-car and mail-car were perfect wrecks. No one was killed. Only seven people were hurt, and none of the seven was in serious condition. Really, Bobby, it was beautifully arranged. Some guardian angels would have bungled it. I might have felt responsible, if any one had been badly hurt; but there I was, there was the good-looking man, there were the proprieties intact, there were prejudices brushed aside. The measures had been radical, but effectual."

"But the gray gown?" insisted Bobby.

"I'm coming to the gray gown. You wouldn't have me put my climax in the middle of my story, would you? Men usually do that. Then the rest of the story is boresome. I've often longed to teach the philosophy of rational development to the men I know.

"Given a summer season, given seashore or mountain stage-setting, given a man and a maid: how shall the man and the maid evolve

a plot that will be progressively dramatic, but not reach its climax until late September? There's a problem for the class. The average man drops the climax into the middle of August. Then a good thing is spoiled, and what shall the man and the maid do with the tag-ends of the season?

"Haste is fatal to all good work, Bobby. Where was I?"

"On the edge of the ditch," prompted Bobby.

"Yes, that's it—and I like being on the edge of a ditch. There's the possibility of going either way, and there's a fair certainty of excitement, past, present, or future.

"The Gobolink had blossomed into the good-looking man, because there were lanterns and torches. His cheek was cut, but that wasn't a disfigurement."

"Probably his cheek could stand cutting," growled Bobby; but Nancy overlooked it.

"He put me down on a big rock and went off for a while. Then he came back, and told me all about things. He said there was a farm-house not far away, and that he would take me over there. The wrecking train wouldn't be along for some time, and we couldn't go on our way for several hours. In the meantime

he wanted something to eat, and I must have something.

"He tucked me under his arm and trailed me off up the hill, in the wake of a boy, who seemed to have been engaged as guide. He was a very magerful man, Bobby; and after a railroad wreck, I believe I like magerfulness. I was docile. I was lamblike. You wouldn't have known me.

"The woman of the house was a dear. She took me in and mothered me and purred over me, and was disappointed because I didn't bear a scratch. It cheered her, though, to have a chance at the man's cheek, and she patched it up beautifully. Her man had gone to the wreck, but she had thought somebody might be brought to the house, so she stayed at home. Nobody else wandered up there. She guessed they must have gone to one of the other farmhouses, and she distinctly resented it, but she treated us royally. We had eggs and bacon, Bobby, and two kinds of pie, and something like fifty-seven different varieties of marmalade and pickles. After supper the Man went down to the wreck, but he came back soon—said he wasn't needed.

"The hostess went into the kitchen to 'wash up.' Give me the country for real

friendliness, Bobby. I could have loved that woman. Just think how little excitement she must have in her life, and what a godsend we must have been—and yet she wouldn't spoil a *tête-à-tête* for all the world.

"I hope I'm good, Bobby; but I'm not so good as that.

"We had a beautiful time, the Man and I, in that best room. The green crocheted mats and the wax flowers were positively inspiring —and then I was glad to be alive. That gave me an unselfish desire to make things interesting for other people, and I did my best with the limited opportunity offered. I was in love with Providence—but I didn't yet realise the scope of my blessings. I was regarding the Man as plain man. Even in that light he was admirable.

"He was so sympathetic about my luggage. We went down to the wreck and he had men hunt for my trunk, but there wasn't anything left of it, apparently. I sat on a log and wailed aloud. All my good clothes at one fell swoop —and Daddy hard up!

"It was too much. Of course the clothes were rather shabby, but as I looked back at them they seemed altogether lovely. And how

could I be bridesmaid for Priscilla, in a muddy travelling-gown?

"The Man came and sat on the log with me, and I told him all about it. He's the kind of man to whom one tells things. He understood just how I felt, which was wonderful, considering the fact that he had never worn a pink chiffon evening-gown and grown attached to it. He asked how many gowns I'd lost, which was impertinent; but I didn't think so at the time. I accepted it as perfectly natural interest in an overwhelming calamity. I told him about the gowns. I dwelt upon their good points. It was like talking over the virtues of a dead friend. The good points grew as I thought of them. The dressmaker who made those gowns wouldn't have recognised the radiant and beautiful creations as I presented them, but I didn't mean to exaggerate. The blessings had brightened as they took their flight. I lingered over the opera cloak until the Man asked me if I hadn't ever had my picture taken in it, and said he considered that Fate had been bitterly unkind to him, because he'd never been allowed to tuck me into that cloak. When I came to my white Virot hat I cried. Yes, I did, Bobby. It was such a duck of a hat, and I was so tired and shaken

up, and I felt as if I'd never be able to buy another hat above Grand Street. The tears just trickled miserably down my nose, and I dabbed at them with my kerchief and sniffled. Yes, I'm afraid I sniffled. I always do when I cry. That's the reason I don't cry often. It isn't pluck. It's vanity. But that white hat! I simply choked over it; and yet, I was smiling like an imbecile, too, over my foolishness.

"The Man looked savage.

"'Don't do that!' he said. 'Don't, I tell you.' I've never been spoken to so, Bobby. It paralysed me into tearlessness. I shouldn't have expected him to be unsympathetic.

"He looked sheepish, but still savage.

"'If you do that again, I'll—I'll—well, I'll make you angry and scandalise the crowd,' he said.

"After all, I don't believe he's unsympathetic. But I didn't cry any more.

"When our train came we sat together. It was late, but I had to get off at 12:30. The Man handed me over to Priscilla and her brother. He gave me his card, and I asked him to call on Daddy and be properly thanked. He hesitated a minute, and then said he had some influence with the road, and would see that my claim for damages was attended to at

once, without legal formalities, if I would fix a valuation. I couldn't do it. The clothes seemed beautiful in retrospect, but I knew they were almost worn out. The train was starting. 'Never mind,' he said; 'I've a sister, and I guess I have a fairly complete inventory. We'll make allowance for sundries.'

"He climbed on the rear platform and was gone.

"I borrowed one of Priscilla's *trousseau* gowns to wear to the wedding, and stayed a week in borrowed clothes.

"The day before I come away I heard from Daddy. He said he had had a letter from the railroad officials, inclosing a cheque to cover the amount of my loss in the wreck. He had also had a call from the attorney of the road, who explained that he had taken the liberty of attending to my claim because he had been on the train at the time of the accident, and had had the pleasure of being of some slight service to me.

"The cheque was for $1,500. Daddy was shocked, but said the only thing for it was to take it all as a business matter and make no protest. He considered, however, that I had been dishonest in setting my valuation. He was desperately disapproving. I couldn't make

him understand that I didn't deliberately overrate those frocks, and couldn't be responsible for a railroad man's idea of sundries.

"I've had an orgy at my dressmaker's and milliner's. The Gobolink is coming to dine with Daddy to-morrow.

"General solicitor of the road, Bobby!—and he might have been travelling salesman for a hardware firm. Oh, this is a good world.

"Bobby, you don't look happy. I wasn't killed in the wreck, you know. It's not a sad story, at all.

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll—I'll—Bobby, when you are so tired of me that you want to put the continent between us, I'll get you a pass."

A DISTURBER OF THE PEACE

A DISTURBER OF THE PEACE

JACK RAINSFORD was primarily responsible for Nancy's sociological experiment. If he had allowed her to be a sister to him, the young woman would have kept the somewhat uneven soprano of her way without feeling the need of excursions outside of her own peculiar province of sociological research.

Jack is a nice boy, but he is lamentably wanting in appreciation of the fraternal relation. He had distinct and well-defined ideas concerning the thing he wanted, and a sister was not the thing.

Consequently, when Nancy magnanimously offered to regard him as a brother, he declined promptly and decisively. He also said things in regard to feminine strategic methods which were more truthful than polite, and which wounded Nancy deeply. To be misunderstood is always painful. Possibly there is only one thing more painful. That is to be understood.

The frank and unresigned Mr. Rainsford

turned his back upon the false fleeting one and went his way.

"Youth, youth!" apostrophised Nancy from her vantage point of twenty-two years—but her smile was a trifle wobbly at the corners. She has the saving grace of being honest with herself, and of recognising the truth, even when it drops from the lips of youth. Moreover, she liked Jack.

"He's quite right," she confided to the blue-and-white teapot. "I'm a horrid little cat—and I'm going to reform."

She sat up very straight and punched a down cushion emphatically.

"I hate a flirt,"—even the dragon on the teapot appeared to smile.

"I'm going to do something to make people happy—chronically happy, I mean." The fine glow of purpose was interrupted by a reminiscent twinkle.

"I've done a good deal toward making people happy—in spots."

That evening Miss Reynolds was not at home to callers. Arrayed in a most becoming pink boudoir gown, she sat in her own room and pondered.

At last she scrambled out of the easy-chair and went to her desk. Her mind was made up.

Miss Caldwell, Isabel Worthington's cousin, was one of the head workers of the Essex Street Settlement. Only a week before she had talked to the members of the Current Events Club about the possibilities of East Side work, the need of intelligent workers. Nancy had once conducted a dance club at the church parish house with distinguished success. She would enlarge her arena and would go in for sociology seriously.

Since Jack Rainsford refused to have her for a sister, she would be a little sister to the East Side.

A letter to Miss Caldwell, and an interview with that estimable and enthusiastic woman, clinched the matter. Mr. Reynolds objected, and Mrs. Reynolds had visions of myriad microbes, but Nancy has a way with her even when dealing with parents.

The prospective sociologist bought two new tailor suits, with instep-length skirts—out of consideration for her mother's scruples against microbe collection, as she explained when the bill came in. She also invested a considerable lump sum in silk stockings of a superior charm.

"Really, Nancy," protested her mother feebly.

"We'll look upon them as a contribution to

the Fresh-Air Fund, Mumsey. They'll be like a day in the country to the observing poor."

But, in spite of a frivolous attitude toward costuming for the *rôle*, the young woman was in earnest, and honestly ready to spend and be spent in the cause of the poor.

"She has a beautiful spirit," said Miss Caldwell to Doctor Braddock, her co-worker, after their decisive interview with the aspirant for a settlement niche.

"She has a beautiful face," commented the Doctor, with such conviction that Miss Caldwell looked up at him sharply.

The new worker dawned upon the settlement on the first of April. There were up-town friends unsympathetic enough to intimate that there was a peculiar appropriateness in the day chosen, but Nancy ignored the comment.

She plunged into the work with a zeal refreshing to behold, and the precinct went down before her like grain before the mower's scythe. The babies who were brought to day nursery crowed when she took them from the little mothers. The kindergarten tots giggled joyously at the very sight of her. The boys' club suspended hostilities and became as a flock of lambs when she loomed upon the horizon. The mothers' meeting took her, figura-

tively speaking, to its collective bosom, the first time she poured tea for it.

"She fits in anywhere," said the delighted Miss Caldwell.

And Nancy? She was radiant. Appreciation is the breath of her being, and though she had enjoyed a very generous share of that commodity, never before had it come to her in such solid lumps.

Her heart swelled within her. She loved the East Side individually, collectively, and in family groups. Possibly she loved not wisely, but too well. Her treatment of the small children was not always according to Froebel, and her principles concerning the pauperising the poor would have given the directors a shock, had they been made public.

She was not always just, but she was generous. The East Side imposed upon her and adored her. A visit from her meant more to the sick than all the dispensary's medicine, and no tenement was grimy enough, no patient disreputable enough to appall her.

She laughed and talked and smiled her way where sociology of the noblest and most psychological type found the door slammed in its face.

Several weeks went by and the first fine

careless rapture of Nancy's enthusiasm showed no sign of decline.

In the meantime the settlement work grew and flourished in marvellous fashion—various phenomena of the development interested the directors and workers exceedingly, and furnished the theme for much psychological and sociological theorising and discussion among the devoted band.

The boys' club swelled to unheard of proportions. Doctor Braddock was inclined to credit the gymnasium with the progress in this line, but many of his co-workers insisted that the introduction of self-government principles, parliamentary rules, and committee work had caught the boys' interest. Nancy, who was particularly knowing in matters of parliamentary rules, thanks to class presidency at college and club presidency since, and who took a special interest in instructing the boys in these matters and overseeing the committee work, was convinced that these new ideas and methods were the drawing card, and urged Doctor Braddock to personal supervision of the subjects, but he was a busy man and assured her that she was doing fairly well.

As an outcome of the boys' club came a demand for clubs for the older men. Here,

too, parliamentary rules were in order, and Miss Reynolds was called into consultation upon everything from the opening of a window to the drafting of resolutions of condolence for a widower.

Miss Reynolds was also mistress of ceremonies and dancing-teacher for the social clubs, and the street-corners and saloon-doors were left lonely on club nights.

"We're gathering them in, we're gathering them in," said Doctor Braddock jubilantly. "In time this settlement will clear up this whole neighbourhood. We are getting a hold upon public opinion in the district. People are beginning to understand our motives and appreciate the opportunities we offer."

But the crowning triumph of the settlement was the reforming of Billy Harrigan.

Billy was the leader of the Goerck Street gang, the bogie-man of the district. Small boys spoke his name with bated breath and fearful admiration. The tale of his toughness resounded throughout the whole East Side, and moved even Gas-House Charlie to jealousy.

With his hat on one side, his red tie flaming, his diamond stud blazing, and his lower jaw at an aggressive angle, he held up the bar in Smooth Mike's saloon and was pointed out to

visitors as a local celebrity; or he strolled down the Bowery leaving a wake of murmured admiration behind him as he passed, and setting feminine hearts a flutter with his lordly glance.

The battles he waged and the deeds he did demand an epic strain, but for a brief season there was an interregnum in his busy life, and the bird of peace brooded over him.

From the very start the settlement had felt his baleful influence. He had ridiculed it early and late, had jeered boys and men out of allegiance to it, had laid traps for the tripping of converts, had played practical jokes upon every one connected with the place. His very name was anathema to the settlement group; and when, one evening in late April, he appeared in the settlement library, with a high patent-leather polish upon face and hair, and a particularly flamboyant necktie, there was confusion in the ranks and conviction of impending disaster. The boys and girls were manifestly agitated, the young women of the settlement were alarmed. Doctor Braddock was away. Miss Caldwell was reading a paper at an up-town club.

Nancy, arranging music upon the piano in the big club-room, preparatory to an informal

concert, was confronted by Eliza Lowenstein, whose short braids quivered with excitement.

"Please, ma'am, Billy Harrigan, he's here!"

Nancy dropped the music.

"No!"

"Yes, ma'am. He's fixed up awful stylish, 'n there's lumps in his pants' pockets—maybe they might be pistols. Ikey says he's always got pistols by him. Onc't he——"

The narrative was interrupted by the arrival of the resplendent Mr. Harrigan.

Nancy's spirits rose. He seemed to be a mere man, and she had no reason to be afraid of men. She had always found them amenable to reason. She proceeded to reason with Mr. Harrigan, after her own fashion. First she smiled at him. He appeared to find the operation impressive. Then she held out her hand.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said fervently. "I've wanted to know you."

The man who would not be proud to afford Nancy the privilege of knowing him is yet unborn. Billy Harrigan was tough, but no stoic. He felt his vertebræ softening, but he squared his shoulders.

"Well, I ain't no mamma's boy. Ye can take that straight!" he said defiantly.

"But I'm not making a collection of mamma boys," Nancy assured him. "You see there are so many things I need to know about people and things down here, and nobody could tell me everything as well as you could. I've always thought that if I only knew you, and if you'd help me——"

She smiled again, such a soft deprecatory, pleading little smile that Billy instinctively guarded with his left. He felt that the smile would land.

It did.

Later in the evening, Doctor Braddock, coming from a political meeting, stopped at the club-room door and looked in.

The renowned leader of the Goerck Street gang was handing around plates of ice-cream, in a mild and chastened manner that would have done credit to a curate.

Miss Reynolds was superintending the performance.

"Great Scot!" murmured the Doctor. "Great Scot!" but he was wise enough to leave the situation to Nancy.

Billy Harrigan was nothing if not thorough. Having changed his spots, he went in for settlement joys, with an ardour that was positively inspiring.

Early and late he haunted the library, the club-room, the hall.

He joined everything for which masculinity was eligible.

He sang at the concerts, he danced at the dances, he debated, he boxed, he attended lantern-slide exhibitions, he displayed an unnatural passion for afternoon tea.

Smooth Mike's knew him no more. The Bowery promenade lost its brightest ornament.

Rumours floated into the settlement concerning certain affrays in which the reformed one still indulged, but investigation usually showed that the trouble was the direct result by difference of opinion in regard to the merits of the settlement. Within a short time it was thoroughly understood, throughout the quarter, that Bill would wipe up the street with anybody who said the settlement wasn't the real thing, and criticism of the institution languished.

Then it was that James Donovan tripped on a torn stair carpet, landed on his right shoulder, and broke his arm in two places. The settlement was without a "handy man," and lamentations loud and deep arose.

Nancy, young and inexperienced, did not appreciate the extent of the catastrophe, but

the other workers remembered the time before the smooth running and irreproachable James appeared above the settlement horizon.

It was necessary to have a man about the house, and a man of versatile talents was needed. He must be sober, industrious, amiable, polite. He must be able to run anything, from the furnace to a reception for the bishop, to do any odd job, from holding a baby to ejecting drunken club-members. The combination was apparently a rare one.

Incumbents rose and fell—the falling being inevitably attended by the crash of disaster—until upon a red-letter day, the incomparable James, out of sheer devotion to the settlement cause and "The Settlement Ladies," undertook to be the tutelary genius of the place. Since then the household had known something approaching serenity, and the domestic wheels had run smoothly.

"We'll never find another James," sighed Miss Caldwell.

"Everything will go wrong now," grieved the workers.

But the settlement had yet to know Billy Harrigan.

Even before the unfortunate James was neatly bandaged, Billy was asking for his job.

Incredulity, amazement, delight played over Miss Caldwell's expressive face. A brand from the burning and a handy-man in one! It was too good to be true.

"But are you sure you understand what will be expected of you?" she asked. "There's a great deal of work. Would you be willing to turn your hand to anything that happens to come up?"

"Sure!" affirmed Billy stoutly.

"And you will stay here in the evening?"

"Ye can't lose me."

"The wages aren't high,"

"Fergit it," urged Billy.

"Well, Mr. Harrigan, we'll be very glad to have you with us. When can you come?"

"I'm here—but say, me name's Billy."

When Nancy came in from a round of visits, the new man opened the door for her.

"Why, Mr. Harrigan!"

"Call me Billy. I'm the new main guy. James went off in the hurry-up wagon."

His hat was on his head, there was a cigar in his mouth, but satisfaction and amiability radiated from him.

No one missed James. The new man filled the place. His good nature was unfailing, his strength was amazing, his resourcefulness never

ceased to surprise the household. He was equal to any and every emergency, and a mere word from him quieted the most unruly spirits among the men and boys.

His vocabulary and his manners were picturesque, but, as Miss Caldwell said, that was a thing which time and association would adjust.

Incidently, she asked the workers to assist and to bend the Harrigan twig as rapidly as would be consistent with consideration for an independent and sensitive nature. From Nancy's influence, in particular, Miss Caldwell expected much.

"He seems to have confidence in you, my dear, and you have a great deal of tact. Don't find fault with him, but just let him see that it would please us to have him a little bit different in certain ways. I have a serious sense of responsibility in regard to that young man. We've done wonders with him already, and I feel that we have an opportunity to make a man of him —but don't lecture him or preach at him. We must just show him the beautiful side of life, and make him understand that that is the true life."

Nancy listened with interest and dutifully carried out instructions. Billy gradually be-

came softer of voice, lighter of foot, more respectful of manner. He smoked only in moments of relaxation and threw away his chewing tobacco. The red necktie abdicated in favour of dark blue—Nancy was so fond of dark blue—and pink shirts gave way to white ones. Of course, white soiled easily, but the East Side has no prejudice against adjustable cuffs, and Nancy thought a white shirt and blue tie the most becoming combination a man could wear. Against giving up his hat while in the house the handy man set his face stubbornly for a long time. If, by chance he happened to be without his derby and the door-bell rang, he hunted up his hat and set it upon his head at an angle of forty-five degrees before going to the door.

Independence, self-assertion made that derby their stronghold. Without his hat, the erst-while gang-leader was a Samson without his locks.

At last, the hat capitulated, was relegated to outdoor wear, and Billy Harrigan was shorn of his aggressiveness. A child could play with him—but Billy preferred playing with Nancy, and for the sake of the cause that young woman smiled upon him and gave him much of her attention. Occasionally, when she had to go

out in the evening, Miss Caldwell sent Billy with her. With him for escort, any corner of the slums was safe ground.

One night he took her to a Delancey tenement to see a sick woman, and she decided that she must spend the night. Billy left her, carrying a message from her to Miss Caldwell; but when, tired and nervous after her first face-to-face meeting with death, she came down the stairs in the gray morning light, the handy man was sitting on the door-step.

"Think I was going to leave you alone in this joint? Not on your life!"

"But you haven't been here all night?"

"Sure thing!"

"And my message?"

"Sent a kid with it. How's Mrs. Simmons?"

"Dead." Nancy's voice had a quiver in it.

Billy looked at her sharply. Then he tucked her under his arm.

"You come along home. I suppose you wouldn't hit a flask, but it'd be the thing for you."

Nancy didn't resent his familiarity. She was grateful for it, and she cried quietly from sheer nervousness, as the handy-man led her home.

It was only Billy.

Late that afternoon, Doctor Braddock going to the library for a book, saw Nancy dusting a top shelf, while Billy held the ladder and handed the books to her.

The Doctor stood unseen and studied the handy-man's upturned face. Then he looked at Nancy, and an idea had visible birth in his brain. His lips puckered as though for a whistle, and he shook his head doubtfully as he turned away. The Doctor is a man himself, and he had suddenly had an illuminating side-light thrown upon his sociological theories.

Nancy had not seen the Doctor, and she had noticed nothing unusual in Billy's face. She had treated Billy much as she had treated the kindergarten children, and had taken his homage as she had taken theirs. That a man's desire could cross a gulf like that between the handy man and her had never even faintly occurred to her.

She had smiled upon Billy—teased him, flattered him, praised him, from sociological motives. Possibly natural incapacity for treating a man in any other fashion had something to do with her method, but she had not consciously flirted with this East-Side lion. She liked Billy, liked him immensely, and she had made that plain to him. His logic being

weak and his feelings strong, he argued mistakenly from the flattering premise.

Any lingering doubt had been brushed away that morning. Hadn't she taken his arm and cried against his coat-sleeve, and hadn't he patted her hand encouragingly every now and then, without rebuke? Poor Billy! the eternal feminine was far beyond his sounding.

"Hold it tight."

Nancy was ready to come down the ladder.

"Come ahead."

She gathered her skirts about her and looked down at him.

"It will crumple up, Billy. I know it will crumple up. The spring's broken."

"Aw, come on! I'm holdin' it."

"It's wobbling, Billy. It's wobbling dreadfully. Yes, I'm coming. Oh!——"

She came—in a heap, bringing the ladder with her, but Billy caught her and held her breathless, frightened, in his arms.

Even a handy-man is human. The arms tightened, Billy bent his head and kissed the face so near his own.

The next instant, the width of the room separated Miss Nancy Reynolds, of West 72nd Street, and Mr. William Harrigan, ex-terror of the East Side.

"How dare you! How dare you!" raged the girl with the crimson cheeks and tumbled hair.

Then, dropping from wrath to pathos:

"Oh, Billy, how could you!" she sobbed.

Billy stood awkward but unrepentant beside the fallen ladder.

"How could I a' done anything else?" He asked pertinently. "It's all right," he added, taking a step toward her. "I'm on the square. You're the only girl I ever gave a damn for, and I want you for my steady. I want you to marry me. Don't you see?"

Nancy saw clearly, very clearly, and the up-town man with a distaste for sisters was avenged.

"Will ye? Will ye?"

He was leaning toward her now.

"Oh, you haven't understood! I never dreamed of you feeling this way. I never meant to make you care——"

"Never meant to?" There was a note in Billy's voice that had faded out of the voice of the handy-man.

"D'ye mean you've been foolin' me all the time?"

"I never thought about your—your loving me."

"What'd ye think was the game? D'ye suppose I was stuck on housework? D'ye think I was washin' windows fer love of soapsuds?"

"But it never occurred to me that you'd——"

"Ye thought I was a dough-man, likely—thought ye could laugh at me and say sweet things to me and make eyes at me, and I'd never notice—thought I was clear out of your class, didn't ye?"

The old, rough, dominant note that had belonged to the voice of Bill Harrigan, gang-leader, was growing stronger and stronger.

"An' ye don't want any truck with me, eh? You're all through? Sort of a Chinese Sunday-School proposition, an' me for the Chink?"

"Billy, don't—please don't! I do like you. You've been so good to me and I've depended on you, but I couldn't think about you except as a good friend. I never thought of your falling in love with me. Truly I didn't, Billy. Please be friends—please be friends."

"Aw, hell!" commented Billy.

She heard the front door slam behind him.

The settlement had lost a handy-man.

The loss of the settlement was the gain of the gang, and the night when the Harrigan

returned to his own, will long be remembered on the East Side.

Billy made his way to Smooth Mike's, and accumulated what in the vernacular is called a load. Then he sent out a rallying call, and loyal followers, overlooking his temporary fall from grace into the paths of sobriety and sociology, gathered round his standard.

After a protracted period for rest and refreshment, the Goerck Street gang, under their old leader, started out to make up for lost time.

As a starter, they cleaned out Durfy's Hall, where the Cherry Street boys were having a dance; and this preliminary whirl proved so spectacular that it not only began, but closed the programme.

Eight of the gang landed in jail, five went to the hospital, the rest dispersed without leaving addresses. Billy Harrigan was among the hospital contingent, with a bullet through his shoulder and a knife slash in his arm, but his vocal organs were not affected, and when Doctor Braddock hurried to see the one-time handy-man, Billy expressed his opinion of toffs in general and of sociologists in particular, with a force and fluency that did credit to his early training.

Out of the harvest of eloquence, the Doctor gleaned certain straws of suggestion which gave him a clue to the situation.

His surprise was not so great as was Miss Caldwell's when their star assistant, pale as to lips and heavy as to eyes, presented herself in the office that evening and announced her determination to give up settlement work.

"I'm not fit for it," was the girl's only answer to all argument.

"And she was so successful, so brilliantly successful!" Miss Caldwell said in a puzzled tone after Nancy had gone to her room.

"But possibly a trifle too stimulating," commented Doctor Braddock, with a smile which his fellow-workers did not understand.

THE LITTLEST SISTER

THE LITTLEST SISTER

THE crowd had melted away. Madame dozed behind the cashier's desk. Two or three waiters chattered in low tones in the rear of the room. A huge black cat wandered in and out among the table-legs, occasionally pausing to rub languidly against one of them.

At a table near the window two men lingered over their wine and cigars, with their elbows on the table, and in their faces the serenity that marks the after-dinner hour of the man who has confidence in his digestion.

"It is the only good wine in the cellars," said the little French doctor, lifting his glass and eying the Burgundy in it with cheerful approval.

"In ten years I have tried them all. I still live. *Mon Dieu!* That is to the credit of my parents, who presented me with my constitution. But this Burgundy—keep the number in your heart, *mon garçon.*"

The artist did not listen. He was in a sentimental mood. That was his tribute to

the Burgundy. Still, wine need not be potent to stir the artist to sentimentality. He oozes it at the pores. His father presented him with temperament instead of constitution.

The doctor, too, had temperament—being a Frenchman. That was why an acquaintance begun on a Washington Park bench had led to friendship. But, in the doctor's case, years had tempered sentiment with cynicism. His moods were never maudlin.

The artist raised his glass. "Woman!" he said softly.

The doctor drank with him. "But it is a foolish toast," he commented as he wiped his lips. "'A woman, the woman'—that is rational, but 'Woman!' no, *mon garçon.* There is no woman. There are women—generalisations don't apply to the sex. There are good women, there are bad women—but the ways of being good and of being bad, there is no end to them. A woman's heart writes her creed. Who shall say what is good, what is bad? Not I. My wife?—yes; but my wife does not fear responsibility. She damns with a verve, with a liberality. But it is superb. Me—I say, for what does *le bon Dieu* employ the blessed St. Pierre and a recording angel? It is not for me to guard the golden gates.

"There was the little sister. My wife says she is damned. I—I see that she is happy. *C'est tout*—to be happy. Afterward? I do not know. It is my wife who has the information."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and went back to the Burgundy. His wife is strenuous and voluble. Luckily, she is married to a philosopher.

"The little sister," echoed the artist, catching hungrily at a suggestion of romance, "who was the little sister, *mon ami?*"

"I have not told you? No? But I thought I had told you all my stories—all. *À la bonne heure!* I will tell you the story of Claire, *la plus petite sœur*—the littlest sister, you would say, is it not?

"She was beautiful—but of a beauty, *mon garçon!*"

The artist rested his chin comfortably upon his hands. The story began well. He worshipped beauty, and this was the second bottle of Burgundy.

"Beautiful as an angel," went on the doctor, with Gallic enthusiasm, "but not an angel. No—human, quite human. Slender and white and fair. She had hair all netted with sunbeams—but it was under her veil at first. It

was with her great blue eyes and her lips, and the curve of her chin, and her voice that Jean fell in love. He did not need the hair. But a woman's hair, *mon garçon!* For me, a woman's hair——"

The artist moved restlessly.

"Why a veil?" he asked.

The doctor looked surprised.

"Ah, I have not told you? She was a nun. But, yes, one of *les petites sœurs blanches.* It is a most holy order, the most severe in the world, they say. They dress all in white, the little sisters, and they never leave the convent after they go in through the door. They sleep in their coffins. They eat no meat. They are sworn never to look upon the face of a man. They flog themselves and do penance. They pray, pray, pray! It is gay, is it not? It is said—I repeat it, but I do not believe — it is said that also the little sisters never speak. *Mon Dieu,* it is too much! For the rest, yes; but a houseful of silent women? No. When one speaks of miracles, *moi, je m'en passe,* one must be reasonable.

"There was a convent of the order in St. Quentin. You do not know St. Quentin, *mon ami?* Oh, it is pity!"

The doctor took up his glass solemnly and rose to his feet.

"France!" he said. It was warmer, more reverent than the artist's "Woman!"

They drank the toast standing, then the doctor took up his story.

"It was a thing to be proud of, so holy a flock. We were proud. Yes. And the women gossiped. The men? They may have listened. There was only Sœur Angela, who came and went between the town and the convent. She was not silent, Sœur Angela. The fastings had not made her thin. Sanctity had not made her beautiful. She was old and fat. It must have been a large coffin in which Sœur Angela slept. She talked in the market-place. It was only for the marketing that she left the convent. And every one asked questions. It was so the gossip found food. The Mother Superior had been a duchess—a most worldly duchess. She had lived while she lived, that holy lady. Then she turned *dévotée*. It is so with French women. It is to strike a balance. She had been very beautiful. There had been tales. Oh, we had heard even in St. Quentin! But now she was a saint and cold—Sœur Angela shivered when she spoke of that cold.

"And there was Claire, *la plus petite sœur*.

All the town loved Claire as they feared the duchess, though no one had seen either. One day a baby had been left at the convent door. The sisters took it in. That was Claire. She grew up there behind the walls, and she was happy—the only young, happy thing in the place. The sisters adored her. Even the Reverend Mother thawed for her, and Sœur Angela wept when the spoke of her. It was a good soul, but Sœur Angela was not beautiful when she wept.

"'It is an angel,' she would sob, 'but of a sweetness, of a beauty like a flower in the wind, and with a voice! A voice of gold! And for a smile—but it is to see open the gates of paradise.'

"So we loved the littlest sister, and we young men dreamed. I was young then, *mon ami.* It was sacrilege to dream, but when one is young—ah, *mon Dieu,* when one is young!

"It was in 1870 that it happened. France was in a frenzy then. So long ago. Yes. But France is in a frenzy now, when she remembers. We in St. Quentin heard the echo of '*À Berlin!*' Then we heard rumours. We heard facts. We questioned, doubted, raved. The Prussians were coming. It was

true. We believed at last. *Eh bien*, let them come! We were Frenchmen. We would show the Prussian pigs how a Frenchman could defend his home. Ah, *les beaux jours*! St. Quentin was a walled town. Ammunition was stored, fortifications were strengthened. There were crowds in the streets. There were speeches in the *cafés*—but such speeches, *mon garçon!* It was fire! It was thunder! Then, one day there were shells in the streets. It was the town that burned, not the speeches.

"A demand for surrender. We laughed. The Prussians shelled the town. The women and children were ordered to the casemates. Then, when they were safe, some one said, 'But the little sisters?' We had forgotten them. They were not of the world. This was a worldly crisis. We had forgotten, and we were ashamed.

"Jean Baudolf was sent to bring them. He was a butcher, young Jean, and handsome —an eye, a leg! We had no chance, we others with the girls. It was Jean here, Jean there— and we liked him for all that. Such a devil of a fellow, so gay, so goodhearted, so reckless. He was popular, that rascal Jean.

"He ran up the hill, whistling. I can hear him now. There was danger. He whistled

more gaily for that. He knocked at the convent gate. The wicket opened. Even Sœur Angela smiled at Jean.

"'The Prusians shell the city, *ma sœur*,' he said.

"'Yes my brother.'

"'You are to come to the casemates.'

"'It is impossible, my brother.'

"'But you are in danger.'

"'It is as God wills, my brother.'

"The wicket snapped shut. Jean was left *planté là*. He swore at the blank, white wall. Then he came down the hill and told us. *Mon Dieu*, what excitement, what sputtering! The women said nothing could be done. The men said something should be done. Frenchmen to see thirty women killed, even if the women wished it so! Never!

"Monsieur le Maire was having his shoulder tied up. It is not easy for a five-foot man, with a round belly, to look warlike, *mon cher*. Our mayor did it. Ah, but he was magnificent, that mayor!

"We had never known him before. He could drink. He could speak, but it was in danger that he was superb. I take off my hat to his memory. He is dead—of a fit. There had been a banquet. Ah, *un brave*,

un brave, in peace or in war, *le maire de St. Quentin.*

"It was he who spoke. '*sacré nom de mon oncle!*' he roared. 'We will bring them whether they will or not.'

"He went up the hill. We followed, we others. He knocked at the wicket. It opened. It shut. Monsieur le Maire grew purple in the face. He lifted a fat leg. Bang! The door groaned. Bang! The second kick broke the lock. We tumbled into the courtyard. There was service in the chapel. The music droned on. There was a roar, a crash, a sound of splintering wood and glass. A shell had fallen in the dormitory. The chant wavered. It broke. Then it went on again. Oh, *ces femmes, ces femmes*! How brave they can be —in a foolish cause!

"We ran to the chapel door. We took off our hats and stood there. The little sisters fluttered like a flock of doves. They drew their veils across their faces and huddled behind the Mother Superior. She came down the aisle toward us. I wanted to run. Prussians, yes. A man may face Prussians, but this was different.

"'Messieurs,' she said, 'this is sacrilege.'

"Oh, *mon ami*: That voice! I shiver now.

It was of ice—of ice, but of fire, too. We trembled, we faltered. Monsieur le Maire stood fast. Ah, *un brave! un brave!*

"'*Ma mère*,' he said, you must come with us. We have entreated. Now we command.'

"And only five feet tall, that mayor, *mon garçon*: A little round man, at whom we had always smiled.

"'You must come,' he said.

"'Must,' she repeated. Ugh! It was to freeze the marrow in one's bones. She towered, *mon ami*. She trembled with rage.

"'Go,' she said, lifting her hand. 'Go, before the judgment of heaven falls upon your impious heads.' It was awful. It made my hair to rise slowly, slowly.

"'Come,' said Monsieur le Maire. He swelled with determination. 'Come, before the Prussian shells fall upon your foolish head!'

"He grabbed her, *mon garçon*. But yes! He grabbed the Reverend Mother around the middle. She was heavy, but he was strong. He lifted her. He carried her, kicking and struggling. No thunderbolt fell. We plucked up heart. Each man seized a woman. *Mon Dieu*, how they wriggled, how they screamed! We carried them across the courtyard through

the door, into the streets. Some were quiet, after the first.

"'To feel a man's arms round her, a man's breath on her cheek, that might make ghosts rise and stir in many a nun's heart. *N'est-ce pas, mon ami?* What they felt, those nuns, it would be interesting to know.

"But the Reverend Mother! What she felt was rage. She could have killed. It was but lacquer, the saintliness. Scratch it. The duchess showed through.

"'If we must go, let us go with dignity,' she said to the mayor, who puffed and panted, but held her fast. 'We will go. Do not touch us! Cowards, who insult women!' It was to blush, *mon ami*, but we had been right, and we had had our way. We were gay, even when the ice crackled in the speech of the duchess.

"We set the nuns on their feet. They scurried to the Reverend Mother. They went down the hill before us. It was like a garden of lilies swayed by the breeze, save for Sœur Angela. She was a sturdy flower, Sœur Angela. It would be a hurricane that could sway her. The blacksmith had carried her. He was a Hercules, that young blacksmith, but when she walked again he wiped the sweat from his brow. He fished a flask from his pocket.

"And Jean? His arms were not tired. He had no flask. Yet his eyes were the eyes of a man who drinks till the fire is in his veins.

"It was the little Claire whom he had carried. She was a feather-weight. She had not struggled. She lay quite still. Her veil had blown back. She looked up into Jean's eyes. All blushes, yes. She shut her eyes. She opened them. They answered his. Pouf! It is like that sometimes, *mon garçon.* A girl, a lad, a moment. It is done. The years cannot change it. So!

"Me—I studied the *dot;* but once there was a little milliner. I was but twenty—zut! it is not my story that I tell, but Jean's. He sighed when he put her down. She sighed. She drew her rumpled veil, but she gave him her eyes first. She clung close to the Reverend Mother. She was frightened by the thing she felt. She has told me since, and she blushed when she told.

"In the casemates every one was waiting. There was respect. There was consideration. The sisters sat in a shadowy corner, with their heads bowed, their hands before their faces. There was a murmur of prayer. When food was offered, they refused; but the second day the Reverend Mother listened to reason—and

hunger. 'Eat, my children,' she said. They ate bread and water. At first the hands were pressed tightly over the eyes. Then the slim fingers slipped apart, slowly, slowly. Wounded men were brought in. There was care, there was grief, and finally the Reverend Mother spoke:

"'It is not our will that brings us here, my children. God will forgive our broken vows. There is work to be done. We will do it.'

"So they came out from the corner, and they nursed the wounded. Ah, that duchess! What a woman she must have been before she turned saint. I had a scratch. She bound it. I understood that she must have much to repent.

"But one day it was Jean who was carried in, very white, very still, a hole in his shoulder, the blood flowing fast. And the littlest sister knew before the men who carried him had crossed the doorstep. I saw her. Her face went white—but white like her veil—and there was a live thing in her eyes. It was fear. She went quickly, with bandages in her hands. She leaned over him. He opened his eyes.

"'Am I then already dead and in paradise?' he said.

"Ah, that Jean—but he had the tongue, the eyes, and this time he had the heart.

"*Eh bien*, the story is told, *mon garçon*. What end could there be? The Prussians marched into the town. We were brave. They, too, were brave, and they were strong. They marched out again. It was not only the Prussians who had besieged. It was not only St. Quentin that had surrendered.

"The life of the town flowed back into its old channels, but there were gaps, there were changes.

"The Reverend Mother gathered her flock around her and led them back to the convent, but there were only twenty-nine who went.

"The littlest sister would not go. She was pale. She was sad. She wept; but she shook her head. The Reverend Mother commanded. She entreated. She persuaded. It was quite useless.

"'*Je l'aime*,' the littlest sister said.

"'I love him.' That was all. That was enough. It was answer to every argument. The thing was quite simple. Women are like that, *mon ami*.

"And the duchess understood—though she had been dead so long.

"She took the littlest sister's hands and

looked down at her. I saw the good-bye. Cold? The coldness was like the saintliness, *mon cher*—lacquer, only lacquer. She loved the little sister. She would have kept her safe from world pain, but she understood.

"Ah, what a woman—if she had not been a saint!

"She saw the ghosts of her own love, of her own youth, in the little sister's face. Yes, I think she saw that. It was in her eyes. It was on her lips, and the duchess sighed; but the Mother Superior—that was another woman. She drew her veil. She went up the rugged path to the convent. The door in the wall opened. It shut. What happiness some men miss in order that we may have saints. *Eh, mon cher?*

"The littlest sister, too, had chosen. She stayed in the wicked world and married Jean the butcher. Happy as a bird, *mon garçon.* Damned? I do not know. It is my wife who says it."

WOMEN ARE MADE LIKE THAT

WOMEN ARE MADE LIKE THAT

THE cab rattled through the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter, and Bruce Morgan stared out at the dingy buildings and the motley crowd on the pavements. In an idle, unemphatic way, he was hating it all. The gospel of dirt as preached by unappreciated genius had never attracted him. Save as an unavoidable adjunct of the noble game of football, he strenuously objected to dirt in any form, mental, moral, or physical. He was not remarkably good, but he was clean, and that is the next best thing, if not a synonym.

During his two years in Paris he had occupied bachelor apartments in that quarter of broad spaces and flooding sunshine which the dwellers on the *Rive Gauche* call *banal*, and in which those good Americans who go to Paris before they die, but who are studying nothing in particular, save the gentle art of enjoying life—emulate the lilies of the field.

There he had found a bath-tub to his liking, so there he raised his Ebenezer and installed his Lares and Penates. To be more accurate,

he paid the rent, and Watkins, the valet, attended to the Lares and Penates.

Life went very well then, and the well-groomed and cheerful young American played among the lilies of the American Quarter contentedly. He didn't even make frequent excursions into unkempt Bohemia until after he met Elizabeth. After that he learned the Latin Quarter. Not that he grew fonder of it. On the contrary. But he grew more fond of Elizabeth, and when he wanted anything, a mere matter of local colour could not discourage him.

As for Elizabeth, she was what the wondering *bourgeoisie* who leaven the Latin Quarter call "*une artiste curagée*"; but she had lived in a cluttered studio on the Rue Vavin, and had eaten her meals at a *crêmerie* for three years. Her artistic fervour was not waning, but the magic light that never was on Bohemia was dimmed a trifle to her vision. A freshly washed, immaculately clad, good-looking young man, about whom clung an odour of jockey-club rather than turpentine, who rode in cabs and scattered violets and roses, and appeared to have no secret sorrows nor thwarted ambitions, appealed to her as inartistic but distinctly comforting.

So he came to the studio often. One day a miracle happened, and after that he came oftener.

Elizabeth Russell had a reputation in the Quarter for dignity of a rather glacial variety. Her beauty won her adorers, and her coldness drove them to despair—which was all according to orthodox poetic tradition. Her French lovers appreciated the romantic fitness and possibilities of the situation. They wrote poems to "*La belle dame sans merci.*"

The American and English victims of Elizabeth's *beaux yeux*, being hampered by Anglo-Saxon secretiveness, did not write poetry. They only tramped innumerable miles and came home to swear savagely at the *concièrge* and kick the cat.

When severity wrought such havoc, what would have been the casualties had one guessed that this self-sufficient young woman had moments when, without warning, her dignity crumpled up like a pricked balloon, and she became, for the length of a woman's mood, the most appealing, irresponsible of creatures?

Bruce Morgan had seen the metamorphosis, and had promptly done what any normal and love-ridden man would have done, but what a moment earlier would have seemed absurdly

impossible. His arms went round her, his lips touched her waving brown hair, and he held her close, while, in true woman fashion, she hid her face against his coat collar and cried softly. He had a bewildered conviction that his world was toppling about him; but he was quite willing it should topple, so long as the break-up threw the inaccessible into his arms. She didn't stay there long. The moment was too good to last. Before he had fairly caught his breath, she was standing across the table from him, a bit pink as to eyelids and cheeks, a trifle rumpled as to hair, but smiling, self-contained, slightly defiant. And he, being a wise young man in his generation, said no word of the sudden surrender, pressed his advantage no further, but spoke of home letters and the weather. Few men would have understood.

He was gentler with her after that, more patient with her egoism, more in sympathy with her work. Personally, he had never thought much of her talent. He knew something of art, though he had never joined the noble army of aspiring young artists. His income was large, and he preferred buying good pictures to painting poor ones—which may be Philistinism in the eyes of the Latin Quarter and Montmartre, but has its elements of sanity

and altruism. He knew quite well that before a word of praise from one of his lady's masters his warmest love-words would pale into insignificance, and that if his eternal absence could improve her values, she would set him adrift with cheerful unconcern. Still, he was distinctly optimistic about his love-affair. He did not believe in the artistic future of the girl he loved. He had seen enthusiasm wane before failure, and heart-hunger creep into the place of ambition. Then, too, he had the memory of the metamorphosis to encourage him, so he waited patiently.

The waiting had lasted for months before the January evening when his cab scurried along toward the Rue Vavin.

He entered the narrow hallway, climbed the dark stairs, and tapped on the studio door, which was slightly ajar. Through the crack in the door he could see that the studio was dark, save for the glow from a little open stove. Evidently Elizabeth had gone out for dinner. He tucked a card under the door and was turning away, when he heard a muffled sound from the studio. He wheeled sharply and stood listening. The sound was repeated, and the man's lips tightened. Some one was sobbing in the darkened room. For a moment he

hesitated. Then he pushed the door open and entered. After the darkness of the hall. the fire glow was confusing, and the intruder stood peering through the shadows. A dry sob, from the direction of the divan, drew his eyes toward that corner of the room, and he made out a forlorn little figure curled up among the pillows. His hands clinched at his sides, but his voice was very quiet: "Little girl, what is it?"

The tone was a caress. Elizabeth sat up suddenly, and looked at him with wet, frightened eyes. The white quivering face sent a great flood of tenderness surging through him.

"Oh, it is you! You frightened me," she said with a pitiful attempt at a smile. Then she dropped down among the pillows again and hid her face. In an instant he was on his knees beside the couch.

"My little girl! my poor little girl. Cry it all out here." He drew her into his arms and kissed her wet cheeks and murmured fond, foolish love-words, comforting her, as one would comfort a child whose heart was sore; and Elizabeth, the severe, clung to him, sobbing, until his strength and tenderness quieted her, and the sobs died into stifled sighs.

At last, when even the sighs were hushed,

she looked up at him, in a half-startled fashion, and he put her back among the pillows, but his arm was still under her head, and his right hand stroked her hair.

"Tell me all about it, sweetheart," he said, gently.

She told him. The Latin Quarter is full of such stories of young enthusiasm, vaulting ambition, self-confidence, home disapproval, and failure. Her mother had believed in her talent; her New York teachers had encouraged her. Then the mother died, and a matter-of-fact step-father pooh-poohed artistic aspiration. She thought herself persecuted for art's sake, and defied authority. A little money left her by her mother would take her to Paris and keep her there for two or three years. There was a decisive and stormy break with the step-father, conscientious enough, but intolerant of what he thought idiotic folly. Then Paris, and the intoxication of realised longing, of life in the artists' quarter, and study in the French schools.

At first it was all she had hoped. She had money enough for all her needs. The second year went by less buoyantly. She did not make the progress for which she had hoped. She was not the important figure in the *atelier*

that she had been in the New York class. No one paid much attention to her, and the masters were brutally frank. They admitted that she had a certain facility in line, but her colour, her values—atrocious! "Wooden," was L——'s favourite comment as he stopped beside her easel. Still she worked, worked, worked. In the spring her health gave out. She went to the country and lost two months. Then she came back and went to work, more furiously than before, but she did not get back the old strength.

"Paint poison!" said the English doctor whom she consulted. "Stop living in an air-tight, turpentine-saturated hole. Stop work. Don't worry. Eat three square meals a day. Rest—and you'll come out all right. It is a woman-killer, that studio life!"

She tried for the *salon* that year. Her portrait wasn't worth consideration. "Wooden," reiterated L——, when he spoke to her about it; but she worked on. Then the money began to give out, and she realised that what she was to do must be done quickly. There could be no going home. She must work harder, and cut down expenses. She did both, and her technique improved. Naturally, her health did not. It was during that spring that she

met Bruce Morgan, but he never knew how hard life was for her. The haughty poise of the head and the firm lips were not tale-bearers, and though the man had seen her nerves give way once, he had never guessed the cause.

Now January had come, and the game was about played out.

"I'm tired—so wretchedly tired," she said, drearily. The man's arm tightened its hold.

"I'm a failure, a flat failure. I've worked, but it isn't in me. I see now, but I believed I was right. I've left the school. I didn't have the money to go on. L—— talked to me to-day. He meant to be kind. He told me I would better give up and go home—that I was killing myself for an ambition that would never be fulfilled, that I was wasting money and health and time."

There was a sharp catch in the tired voice.

"I can't go home. I can't." The dreary, monotonous voice quickened into pain and rebellion.

When the pitiful little tale was ended, he stooped until his cheek touched hers.

"Will you marry me, little girl? I've loved you all the time."

She shrank away quickly, and his arm loosened its hold.

"It is pity," she said, blushing crimson in the dusk.

"It is love, sweetheart."

"I ought not to have told you, but I was so miserable, and you came, and there was no one else, and——"

"Hush, dear, hush. You should have told me before. I should have known it without telling. I'm a brute."

"And you really wanted to marry me, before to-night?"

"More than I wanted anything else in the world."

"But I don't believe I love you enough."

"Let me teach you," She closed her eyes and lay quite still for a few moments; then she looked at him.

"I can't promise you now. I think it is only because I am a woman and unhappy that I am so glad to be here in your arms."

"Bless her heart, she sha'n't be bothered about deciding anything now. She isn't even competent to decide upon her own dinner, so I'll take that responsibility off her hands." He lifted her to her feet and smiled at her gayly.

"Wash off the tears, put on your hat and

coat, and we'll go to the *Tour d'Argent.*" She looked at him wonderingly.

"I'll have another try for the *salon,*" she said, thoughtfully. Already her work was crowding him aside.

"Paint me," he suggested.

She looked him over judicially.

"Wouldn't you hate it?"

"I'd like it. There's no law to prevent the sitter from looking at the painter, is there?"

"It would save my having a model, and you have a splendid head, and—but it would be a horrid bore for you."

"Not a bit of it. I've promised to have a portrait for my mother, anyway."

"I believe I can do it." A flush was stealing into the pale cheeks, and the head was taking its old self-confident poise.

"Then that's settled. Now for dinner. I'll wait in the cab."

Then he went out into the night, carelessly whistling "P'tite Ninon."

The girl, bathing her eyes in the studio, smiled at the gay little air, and hummed it as she put on her hat and coat.

The portrait was begun the following week, and Elizabeth worked steadily through the short, gray days. Never did a painter have

a model more tireless, and if the sitter chafed against the artist's absorption in her work, he showed no sign of his irritation. He was being painted in his hunting pink; and as he sat carelessly on the solid arm of a great settle, with his hunting-crop across his knees and his scarlet coat flaming against the high oaken back of the seat, he was uncommonly good to look at. But he knew quite well that, so far as his ladye-love's vision was concerned, he was only a matter of colour and line and values. Another man might have been discouraged. He only grew more doggedly determined, and gradually he felt that he was making way. The picture was the thing, but there were days when the artist worked restlessly, when her eyes looked at him as the eyes of a maid look at a man, instead of resolving him into madder and Prussian blue, when she blushed if he spoke suddenly, and her voice had a little thrill in it, as if some song were singing itself in her heart.

He had much to do on those days in keeping himself from walking across the room, kicking the easel aside, picking the slender little woman up in his arms, and holding her there until she would promise to marry him before sundown; but he kept his word to her, and waited.

He had never promised not to make love to her; and he used the hours as a lover can. When she looked from her canvas to her sitter, she met his soul in his eyes, but she understood so little that she never realised she was painting the man's love, not the man. He talked of a host of things, sometimes gaily, sometimes seriously, but always it was of love he talked, for his love warmed even the idlest words into a caress. He told her of his home, his people, his plans, and his dreams, taking her into his life as he had taken her into his heart. There were days when he tossed self-restraint aside and made masterful love to her, calling her, with his lips, the names by which his heart knew her. But he asked her for nothing; and he did not move from his seat on the old settle, nor touch even a lock of the rippling brown hair, or a curve of the white wrist from which the cuff rolled back.

How he learned to know every line of that dainty head and figure as he sat and watched them day after day! Her upper lip had a fashion of trembling when he was most audacious, and the colour that flooded throat and cheeks was a thing to conjure with. He wondered at himself, sometimes, because he could sit there, across the room, and watch the colour

come and go, and hold himself from kissing the tremulous upper lip.

After the sittings there was tea, while the shadows gathered, and the candles threw weird flickering lights through the gloom; and there were jolly unchaperoned dinners, over which Dame Grundy might shake her head in vain. The man's conscience pricked him at times. Perhaps, after all, he was not taking good care of her, but who was there to criticise her going or coming? And in two months she would be his wife.

The portrait went well. Elizabeth felt sure of that, and yet she had learned self-distrust, and dared not believe in her own judgment. Morgan had never even seen the canvas. That was one of his ladye's whims, and he bowed to it, as to all others—the more willingly, perhaps, because he did not believe in her success, and feared his praise of failure would not ring true.

At last the sittings ended. One afternoon Elizabeth threw down her brush.

"I've put all I have into it," she said. "It will have to stand so." Instinctively she held out her hands to him. Her upper lip was trembling, and he stooped and kissed it.

"You have been the best friend a girl ever

had," she faltered. "Will you go away for a little while now, and let me think? Some way or other I—I don't seem to think clearly when you are here."

He laughed gladly, confidently.

"Don't try to think, little one. Feel!"

She shook her head.

"No, I mean it. I'm not sure about anything. Don't come again this week. Next Monday I shall be here. Come then—please —dear." A light flamed in his eyes. He bent his head and kissed the hands he held.

"Till Monday, then—dearest."

When he went away, on Monday, he left his promised wife behind him, and she herself did not understand why she threw herself down on the couch and cried stormily.

The portrait had gone to the *salon* judges, and the artist seemed, in some strange way, to have lost all interest in its fate. She expected nothing of it, hardly thought of it, in her love-warmed days. One morning she received a despatch. It was from Bruce.

"Hope I am first to tell you your picture has a place on the line."

She rose and walked unsteadily toward the open window, stood for a moment staring out

into the sunshine, then quietly fainted upon the floor.

It was later that the full extent of her victory dawned upon her. L—— came to her with the artists' verdict.

"I was a fool," he said, frankly, "and you are a genius. It is the picture of the year. I would not have believed it possible."

The critics chanted a chorus of praise. She walked through the triumphant days as if in a dream. The success was too swift, too complete to seem real, and the pale face wore a wondering, troubled expression, instead of the gladness for which those who knew her looked.

"Some day I shall waken," she said, incredulously, to her lover. He looked at her wistfully. In his heart he was glad of her triumph, but he was uneasy, restless. He did not understand his sweetheart's mood, and he felt, vaguely, that his happiness was threatened by these laurels that had fallen among his roses and violets. She had never been ardent, this little love of his, but she had trembled and glowed under his ardour. Now, she seemed as remote and unimpassioned as if their lips had never met.

One night he went away puzzled, unhappy.

The next morning Watkins brought a letter with the coffee.

"Dear," she wrote, "I've wakened, but the dream was true, and all the rest was dream. I hate to hurt you, but I would hurt you more if I married you. Art was always first, but I thought I had failed. I haven't. The thing I have slaved for, prayed for, starved for, has come—come just when I thought it lost forever, and it seems to me I shall go mad with the joy of it. I realise now that love could never have taken its place, though love might have helped me bear its loss.

"Try to understand. Some other woman will make you happy. I could not. There would always be a rival far dearer to me than you could ever be.

"Don't come. Don't write. It would only make things harder. Forgive me, and let me stay where I belong. "ELIZABETH."

Of course he wrote, of course he went; but it was all useless. There is no adamant like a slender girl egoist. He did not rage nor waste reproaches. That was not his way—but, as he said good-bye, she saw, with the artist's eye for detail, that his face looked white and

old, and that new lines had appeared around his lips since she had painted his portrait.

The next day two great artists stood before the famous *salon* portrait.

"It is a miracle," said one, thoughtfully; "an unknown little art student, and a picture like that!"

His companion laughed cynically.

"No miracle. I call it luck. It isn't given to every painter of portraits to see a naked soul. This little woman saw one and it startled her into genius. How he adored her—and she painted it! Women are made like that!"

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